

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

ISSN 0042 - 2487

October 2011

Vol. 51 No. 2

From Gangs to Terrorism – Crime in Metro Vancouver October Speaker: Kim Bolan

Vancouver has always been a safe city for its citizenry in spite of the fact that the Vancouver area has had a long history of crime, a wide range of illegal acts, motivations, and participants. Terrorism, however, is a relatively new and isolated phenomenon.

From the pre-Vancouver days when Tomkins Brew was given the job as Government Agent and Constable, his job and those of his successors was to maintain law and order in the township of Granville and early Vancouver by keeping town drunks in order. Policing became more complicated with the almost impossible job of controlling brothels. It became even more complicated with the importation of opium which the usually law-abiding Chinese freely used.

Later, Prohibition established Vancouver as a major bootlegging and smuggling centre, and, when BC prohibition was lifted in 1921 it continued on in the US for many years. More than a few prominent Vancouver families got very rich by this smuggling.

Prudish laws left society vulnerable to organized and unorganized crime. Bootleggers thrived in the 1940s as did after hours gambling and private clubs. Patrons would brown bag their

liquor. By 1950 heroin, mainly in the Downtown Eastside area, and in the 1960s biker-driven marijuana trade became problematic. By the 1980s, the Asians and Russian gangs were added to the mixture resulting in an explosion of addictions. Over the years, various gangs battled it out for control of trade as well as prostitution, illegal immigration and extortion. At least a dozen gangs are recognized now, some being organized locally and some international.

The Vancouver Police Force, who have a century of keeping us safe and putting their lives on the line to protect the citizenry, have periodically not been immune themselves. As early as 1899 money from raids on brothels was redistributed within the police department. The 1924 bizarre circumstances surrounding the Janet Smith murder in Shaughnessy suggested a cover-up. Stringent rules on gambling, liquor, etc. in the 1940s saw not only policemen working as doormen at bookie joints but accusations that the Police Chief was receiving payments in brown envelopes. In 1955 he fled to the U.S. until the heat was off and, when he came back, the charges were dropped.

Terrorism is a recent phenomenon for the Vancouver area. The seeming immunity from political, religious

events and eco-terrorism happening elsewhere was shattered with the Air India bombing. No longer could we dismiss it as happening in other places.

For more than two decades, *Vancouver Sun* reporter Kim Bolan has been



Kim Bolan

writing in-depth stories on local crime and terrorism. Ms. Bolan will share her extensive knowledge of, and put into perspective, the various levels of crime in the Metro Vancouver area.

Kim Bolan is the author of *Loss of Faith: How the Air-India Bombers got away with murder*. McLelland & Stewart, c.2002.

Bruce M. Watson

Next Meeting: 7:30 pm, Thursday, Oct. 27, 2011 at Museum of Vancouver

Preznotes

An organizational meeting was held 75 years ago, on October 2, 1936, to create the Vancouver Section of the British Columbia Historical Association. On February 2, 1977, this Section incorporated as a separate society under the name Vancouver Historical Society. (In 1983 the B.C. Historical Association became the B.C. Historical Federation, to more accurately represent itself as a federation of individual societies.)

In January 1937, the B.C. Historical Quarterly reported that membership of the Vancouver Section had reached a membership of 130, with a goal of 150. At the annual general meeting the following October 1937, it was reported membership was at 192. (Of the 412 total members of the Association, 133 were from Victoria and 87 were members-at-large, drawn from across the province.)

The Vancouver Historical Society has met in a variety of locations since 1936, including the Hastings Mill Store, the Grosvenor Hotel, the Georgia Medical-Dental Building, the Maritime Museum, and since 1970 (with some exceptions) at the Vancouver Museum (now Museum of Vancouver).

For over seven decades the Society has been entirely run by volunteers, with various accomplishments in service to the preservation and promotion of the history of Vancouver. There are too many successes to easily choose one or two to highlight, from speakers to publications to monuments to our *City Reflections* documentary, and so on.

To illustrate the difficulty: our list of speakers reads like a who's-who of British Columbia's historical community, including Judge F.W. Howay, Walter N. Sage, W.K. Lamb, Major J.S. Matthews, John C. Goodfellow, Willard Ireland...the list goes on, and these chosen only from our first decade!

I have no doubt the next quarter-century will be as interesting and exciting for the Society as the first three were! Congratulations to us, and happy 75th birthday!

Scott Anderson, President

Study on Family History Research Looking for Participants

We are two professors – Leighann Neilson and Del Muise – from Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario who are conducting research on family history. We are not affiliated with any of the commercial genealogy databases or software providers. We are researchers and family historians ourselves, who want to learn more about the surge of interest in family history. In order for our research to accurately capture what's happening in family history in Canada today, we need the participation of as many family historians as possible.

The survey is available online at: www.cusurveycentre.ca/gensurvey and takes about 20 to 30 minutes to complete. If you're interested in learning about the results of the survey, we'll be posting updates on our blog Genealogy in Canada www.genealogyincanada.blogspot.com.

We anticipate sharing the results of our research with museums, archives, and genealogy societies, all of who are trying to meet the needs of family history researchers. Individual family historians will be able to learn more about how others are conducting their research by reading and commenting on the survey results as we report them on our blog.

Special Archives Tour For VHS Members

The Vancouver Historical Society has been invited to visit the City of Vancouver Archives (1150 Chestnut Street) at 6:30pm on Thursday, November 17, 2011 for a special behind-the-scenes tour of this fantastic resource! If you haven't had a chance to see some of the Archives' treasures (and even if you have!) this event is not to be missed! This tour is for VHS members only, at no cost. As space is limited, please call or email the VHS Info-line before 5:00pm on Monday, November 14, 2011 to reserve your spot.

Welcome New VHS Member

Michael Kluckner

Neon Vancouver — Ugly Vancouver

Did Vancouver's flashing neon signs signal glamour, excitement and big city living? Or was neon part of a tawdry display that disfigured Vancouver's natural beauty?



Photo: Art Jones 1948 VPL Collection 80515

People were of two minds in Vancouver in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Neon signs that we now love were at that time, objects of deep civic controversy.

Neon was one highly visible sign of Vancouver's transition from a sleepy west coast port into a striving,

happening city. Neon became a lightning rod for critics of change, and at the same time, became the focus of a civic conversation about values in Vancouver.

On Thursday, November 3rd at 7:00 pm, Joan Seidl, Director of Collections and curator of Neon Vancouver, will delve into this question and more, in this in-depth talk and tour. Learn more about the history of the signs in the exhibit, Vancouver's evolving hate/love relationship with neon, and how the Museum of Vancouver came to hold a significant neon collection.

The talk is included with admission on that day and it's free for Museum of Vancouver Members.

The neon exhibition opened October 13th and continues until August 12, 2012.

Thank you VHS Members and Friends

We thank the VHS members and friends who have generously contributed \$240 in the past month to the Vancouver Historical Society.

Upcoming Speakers & Events

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 pm on the fourth Thursday of every month except in June, July, August, December). There may be a charge for some special events, which shall be noted.

Thursday, November 24, 2011 - 7:30pm

Mildred Valley Thornton

Speaker: Sheryl Salloum

Learn more about internationally renowned artist Mildred Valley Thornton (1890-1967). The story of this distinctive artist is an important part of BC's history. Fiercely independent, adventurous and driven, Thornton was also a noted journalist, *Vancouver Sun* art critic (1944-1959), book reviewer, published poet, recipient of a Canadian Authors' Association Award for her book, *Indian Lives and Legends* (1966), and an advocate for social justice.

Thursday, January 26, 2012 - 7:30pm

The Drive: A Retail, Social and Political History of Commercial Drive

Speaker: Jak King

Learn more about the history of Commercial Drive, East Vancouver's fiercely independent, wildly entertaining, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-sexual district. Our speaker, Jak King, has devoted himself to the history of the area and has written a book on the subject. He has lived in the area for over 20 years.

Thursday, February 23, 2012 - 7:30pm

The Chinatown Tunnel Myths

Speaker: John Atkin

Everyone's heard about the tunnels underneath Chinatown. Guidebooks tell us they are there; newspapers, books and movies have confirmed their existence. So where are they? In this presentation John Atkin looks at the origin of the tunnel myth, from early San Francisco tour guides' stories and "eyewitness" accounts, to the tunnels as a side show attraction and early film. He will look at why the myth persists even today. John is a civic historian well known as an author and raconteur.

Before & After

This year we celebrate the 125th anniversary of the incorporation of the City of Vancouver. As part of this special year, we visit different locations in the city as they

looked years ago and how they look today. VHS Director Kellan Higgins visited the locations and took our present day photos.



Photo: Leonard Frank, Vancouver Public Library 7758



Photo: Kellan Higgins

In this month's feature, we compare a 1928 view of the Granville and Robson intersection looking northeast with today's view. The intersection seems to be just as busy 83 years ago as it is today but there are differences. Note the policeman using a semaphore type device for traffic control. Turning the handle would display the words "Stop" and "Go." Automated traffic signals have long since controlled the intersection after being introduced to Vancouver in the 1930s. This was also a busy intersection with streetcar routes on both streets with many turning from one street to the other here. The last streetcar to pass here was the "14 East Hastings" route, which was Vancouver's last streetcar line, discontinued in April 1955. The Vancouver Block with its familiar large clock is prominent in the background. So is the Birks Building

beyond it and then The Hudsons Bay Company department store (since renamed The Bay). Today, only The Bay and the Vancouver Block are left with the Birks Building having been demolished in the mid-1970s. Many say this event galvanized the heritage movement in Vancouver. The Castle Hotel is the low-rise building just south of the Vancouver Block. Major changes began in the 1970s as this part of Granville became a transit and pedestrian mall. The Eaton Centre was built on the west side of Granville across from these buildings. The low-rise corner building was demolished in the early 1960s for a Royal Bank building. The others came down for a project that never materialized. The Winners store came to this corner in the early 2000s.

Jim McGraw with thanks to John Atkin

Vancouver Historical Society Leadership - 2011 - 2012 (Elected May 26, 2011)

EXECUTIVE

President	Scott Anderson
Vice President (Programs)	Bruce Watson
Treasurer	Kristen Wong
Recording Secretary	Jean Wilson
Director (Memberships)	Elizabeth Hawkins
Director	Kellan Higgins
Director	Jean Mann
Director	Robert McDonald
Director (Newsletter Editor)	Jim McGraw

APPOINTED POSITIONS

Webmaster	Quasar Data Management
Archivist	Elizabeth Hawkins
Info Line	Barbara Coles

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