

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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Vancouver Noir

October Speakers: John Belshaw & Diane Purvey

Film Noir, largely emanating from Hollywood from the late 1930s to 1950s, was a visual style of high contrasting dark and light which served as a backdrop for street-smart, cynical and pessimistic archetypal characters awash in moral ambiguity. Fast talking, alienated males and women of questionable virtue were thrown together in sexually charged plots centering on one or more murders. Reflecting the cynicism brought on by the Great Depression and WWII which turned society's values upside down, the spoils of gangsterism and vice often trumped the lives and rewards of the hard working average person.

Film Noir became "newspaper noir" with the advent of the Speed Graphic press camera that allowed reporters and photographers to record the immediacy and fascination of the crowd, and the intimate, gory details of crime scenes. This new more intimate reporting exposed a moral ambiguity previously unseen. Pictures of crowds revealed a fascination with participation after the event rather than an empathy with the victims of crime. Being a North American city caught up in the popular culture of the time, Vancouver embraced Noir. However, with its rain-slicked streets as a setting

for crime and decay, the city developed its own version. Although some Vancouver newspaper reporting could have been taken right off the pages of Mickey Spillane, what made the city's crime and decay different was a kind



of denial in that it was perceived as imported and essentially outside the mores of a proper Vancouver.

The city was awash in other contradictions. Repressive liquor laws were applied unequally depending on class.

Fear of juvenile delinquency resulted in youth being pathologized. Political parties and groups were marginalized in various moral panics.

Was this life imitating art or art imitating life? Find out from the next speakers, Diane Purvey and John Belshaw.

Diane Purvey is an Associate Professor and Chair of Education at Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, B.C. She co-edited *Child and Family Welfare in British Columbia: A History* (Detselig Press 2005)

John Belshaw is a former professor of History at Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops. He is the author of *Colonization and Community: The Vancouver Island Coalfield and the making of British Columbia Working Class, 1848-1900* (McGill-Queen's University Press 2001) and *Becoming British Columbia: A population History* (UBC Press 2009)

Purvey and Belshaw co-authored *Private Grief, Public Mourning: The Rise of the Roadside Shrine in BC* (Anvil 2009) and *Vancouver Noir: 1930-1960* (Anvil 2011).

Bruce M. Watson

Next Meeting: 7:30 PM, Thursday, October 25, 2012 at Museum of Vancouver

President's Notes

There has been a great deal of press recently about the findings presented in the Vancouver Foundation's "Connections and Engagement" survey. A key result states that one in three people living in metropolitan Vancouver say it can be difficult to make friends here. One in four say they are alone more often than they would like to be.

I believe some of the tools to change these sad realities are already available to people that feel disconnected from their communities and neighbourhoods: engagement with Societies such as ours.

In our own recent survey, meeting and interacting with people was one of the top three reasons for joining the Vancouver Historical Society for 47% of respondents. We offer several avenues to interact with others that share an interest in Vancouver's history, including our monthly lecture, members-only tours, the annual Incorporation Luncheon, and distinct volunteer opportunities.

And, as Vancouver's oldest historical society I have always felt that part of our mandate is to provide the widest view possible of activities of potential interest to our members and the interested public. This reasoning is the basis of the announcements at the beginning of each meeting, where I try to highlight a few upcoming historical exhibits and tours, regardless of what group or individual is organizing it. This same reasoning is the basis for our website community calendar, which describes as many events and activities as we can find or of which we are notified.

In light of the Vancouver Foundation survey, it seems we are very fortunate to have all the friendly, inclusive, entertaining, and informative individuals and organizations that make up Vancouver's historical community. Remaining one of those "two of three" people that say finding and making friends is *not* difficult is always within reach for members of the Vancouver Historical Society.

Scott Anderson, President
sanderson@vancouver-historical-society.ca

Field Trip: BC Electric Railway Interurban Terminal Turns 100

In celebration of the 100th anniversary of the BC Electric Railway Building on the southwest corner of Hastings and Carrall Streets, the Vancouver Historical Society will be visiting the building at 1:00pm on Saturday, October 27, 2012. Electric railway interurban cars provided frequent service, arriving and departing from the ground floor of this building and connecting Vancouver with New Westminster, Surrey, Langley,



Interurban leaves from B.C. Electric Railway Building, May 30, 1928

*Photo: Dominion Photo Co., Vancouver Public Library
Accession Number: 22735*

Abbotsford and Chilliwack. The six-story Second Empire Renaissance style building was a bustling transportation terminal until the end of electric

interurban rail service up the Fraser Valley in September 1950.

The co-curators of the TO|FROM BC ELECTRIC RAILWAY 100 YEARS exhibit, Makiko Hara (Curator at Centre A) and Annabel Vaughan (Principal of the design firm publicLAB RESEARCH + DESIGN), will guide us through the building.

Please wear comfortable shoes, as we will be standing more than walking. (Chairs will be available at times, though!) Elevators will be used instead of stairs. The tour will be approximately an hour-and-a-half, with questions and feedback.

This tour is for VHS Members only, at no cost. As space is limited to a maximum of 30 participants, please call or email the VHS Info-Line (604-878-9140) before 5:00pm on Thursday, October 25, 2012, to reserve your spot.

Welcome New & Returning VHS Members

Michael Muller

Norris Styba

Growing Up in The Manhattan

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39 on the fourth floor overlooking the main court, a big glass window frosted in the lower panels looking out into the public hallway, through which one could hear the voices and see the shapes of those passing outside. The comparable rooms in suites 38 and 37, however, looked out into the street. The room in number 36 across the hall on the south side of the building overlooking Robson Street, had its back bedroom window opening into a large well. The suites in the four corners of the building were comparably arranged.

To the left of the front hall of our apartment was a small hall opening on its left into the bathroom, with one of those old claw-footed bathtubs without of course, any shower. High up on the wall in this room was a small window letting in light from another small well. To the right of the little hall was the big kitchen, which I presume in most apartments was also used as the dining area. Our apartment had a big black old iron stove, which was now fitted with gas (in the days when it could kill you if it escaped) but which once may have burned wood or coal since it was connected to the wall by a big pipe, which was eventually removed and the hole in the wall covered with one of those decorative plates one often sees in old houses where there used to be pipes to carry away smoke from the oven.

At the inside end of the kitchen there was what once, as I realised many years later, had been a pantry (with a small window letting in light from that same well it shared with the bathroom). But at some point in the history of the building a refrigeration system had been installed. This included a tiny refrigerator fixed in the middle of the former pantry door, leaving a small shelf covered with a door above and a larger space covered with a door below, through which one could crawl on one's hands and knees into what was left of the former pantry, the only way one could now get access to this space. I never understood how this refrigeration system worked, except that ammonia was essential to its operation. Every once in a while the system would break down and ammonia fumes could be sniffed on our floor and were of choking intensity on the main floor and in the basement, where presumably the centre of the system was located. Obviously, at such times it was impossible for little boys like me to venture into the basement to see what was going on!

Next to the kitchen, immediately in front of the front hall, was the big main room endowed, except in the suites on the main floor for some reason, with a bay window. At the farther end of this room was a wide open portal, rather than a door, opening on the second big room. I suppose most dwellers used this room as the main bedroom, even though it was attached to the living room — unless some people might have used the big central room as a dining room (evidence for this was the semi-swinging door between it and the kitchen) and this room as a sitting room. Some suites (those which had an interior well between them) were big enough for this room and the back bedroom to be connected by a door.

To be continued next month in the November issue

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 7:30pm on the fourth Thursday of every month except June, July, August, December).

Thursday, Nov. 22, 2012 - 7:30pm

British Columbia: A New Historical Atlas

Speaker: Derek Hayes

A favourite speaker is back with us to unveil his latest work: *British Columbia: A New Historical Atlas*. How is a historical atlas different from a regular atlas? While a traditional atlas contains detailed topographies and geopolitical landscapes, a historical atlas chronicles history through all that plus old maps, charts and photographs, accompanied by explanatory texts or essays.

Thursday, Jan. 24, 2013 - 7:30pm

Vancouver's Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles

Speaker: Colonel (retired) Keith Maxwell OMM, ED

What began in Victoria in 1883 as the British Columbia Provisional Regiment of Garrison Artillery in 1900, evolved into the 6th Regiment, Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles with headquarters in Vancouver. The Beatty Drill Hall became its home in 1901. One of its members was J.S. Matthews, Vancouver's future Archivist. Designated the British Columbia Regiment (Duke of Connaught's Own) (DCO) in 1920, it still basically retains the same name and is universally known as the "Dukes." Learn more about its fascinating history.

Thursday, Feb. 28, 2013

At the World's Edge — Curt Lang's Vancouver 1937-1998

Speaker: Claudia Cornwall

Poet, artist, photographer, boat builder, fisherman, entrepreneur, software developer would all describe the multi-talented Curt Lang. Writer Claudia Cornwall introduces us to this fascinating Vancouverite and his many works.

Growing Up in the Manhattan Apartments in the 1940s and 1950s

By Richard Toporoski

Last year, we ran a piece in the newsletter about the Busy Bee Grocery on Robson at Thurlow, diagonally across from The Manhattan Apartments. The story brought back many memories for VHS member Richard Toporoski, who grew up in the iconic apartment building in the 1940s and 1950s. He wrote down his thoughts in an essay, which we are pleased to present. Through Richard's memories, we go inside the building the way it was; join him and his playmates; and relive life on Robson as it was 50 to 70 years ago. Due to its length, Richard's article is being published in several installments.

– Jim McGraw, Newsletter Editor



The Manhattan Apartments sometime in the 1910s

Photo: City of Vancouver Archives AM54-S4-1- Richard Broadbridge, photographer

By the time my birth was approaching in 1941, my parents had made the somewhat upscale move from Franklin Street in the East End to the Manhattan Apartments on Robson, just one block into the West End.

Brought home from St Paul's Hospital, I grew up in the Manhattan through the 1940s and 1950s until I left home in 1963. I would return to visit my parents every year until my mother, by then a widow, moved out in 1979.

Finished in 1908, the Manhattan was commissioned by lumber magnate William Lamont Tait, who later had Glen Brae mansion

built for himself in Shaughnessy. The Manhattan's architects were the famous Vancouver firm of Edmeston Parr and Thomas Fee. The Manhattan (perhaps so named to conjure up an aura of sophistication) is a yellow-brick building, made interesting by the contrasting red brick which marks the corners and outlines the windows, a big bay window in each suite created by some kind of tin construction designed to look like stone, and a huge cornice overhanging the building, also created out of the same tin.

Although The Manhattan was not yet 40-years-old when I was a little boy, it always seemed like an old building to me with picture moulding on the walls and old-fashioned light fixtures hanging from the ceilings of the suites. Tin sheeting designed to imitate fancy plastering adorned the ceiling and upper walls of the main floor hallways. The ceilings in the hallways of the upper floors on the other hand, were embellished with real plaster: cornices with dentils and elegant corbels at appropriate intervals. In the refurbishing of 1979, the tin of the main floor disappeared but the elegant plaster of the upper floors fortunately remains.

The suites were roomy, although perhaps a little oddly designed. While each suite was a little different in shape depending on its position in the building, they all shared a common configuration. There was a central entrance hall with, in our case, a dial telephone fixed to the wall.

The suite's front door had an elegant window divided into four glass panels with a mechanical doorbell and a mail slot through which came the mail delivered six days a week to the suite itself. To the right was a back bedroom with, in the case of our suite

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Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2012 - 2013 (Elected May 24, 2012)

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