

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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Vancouver Police Museum, Morgue & Important Cases

October Speaker: Robert Noon

Vancouver as a port city has had more than its share of crime starting with the buccaneer spirit of the earlier years. For the young city to keep up with the legal investigation side, an analysts' laboratory was founded in 1907. By the 1920s, the laboratory was actively assisting the Vancouver Police Department and the Coroner's courtroom with their investigations.

In 1932 the City of Vancouver built its first Coroner's Court building at 240 East Cordova, now a city-designated heritage structure. The top floor encompassed the original Coroner's Courtroom, offices, morgue and autopsy facilities. The main floor and basement housed the forsenics lab and related facilities which performed the toxicological analysis for the Coroner's Department. In 1980, the coroner's facilities moved and the morgue and autopsy functions went to the Vancouver General Hospital. The old facilities had often become the centre of attention in Vancouver because of its work.

The Cordova site became involved in many important cases. Among them, three became particularly famous: the *Babes in the Woods* case, the *Milkshake Murder* and actor Errol Flynn's death in the city's West End.

In 1953 the bodies of two boys aged six and ten years of age, were discovered in Stanley Park by a Parks Board worker. Related items also found were a lunch box, aviator's cap, woman's fur coat and shoe as well as remnants of children's clothing. What role did the Coroner play in this? What



happened to the skeletal remains that were put on display?

When radio promotional manager, Rene Castellani wanted to separate

from his wife, he used White Spot vanilla milkshakes to poison her with arsenic. How did the Coroner's report help with his conviction?

In 1959 when a thoroughly dissipated 50-year-old Errol Flynn came to Vancouver to finalize the sale of his yacht *Zaga* to pay off debts, his body gave out at the home of Dr. Grant Gould, less famous than his piano playing nephew. Naturally, his body was sent to the City morgue for an autopsy that had some unusual moments. These are just a few stories among many.

In 1986 the site was transformed into the Vancouver Centennial Police Museum, now the Vancouver Police Museum, making it one of the older Police Museums in North America. Over 20,000 documents, photographs and artifacts dating from the mid-1800s come to life in interactive displays. It contains badges, insignias, uniforms, history of squads, annual reports, confiscated items, and 10,000 images dating from the 1880s.

The October speaker, Robert Noon, is the Associate Director of the Vancouver Police Museum.

Bruce M. Watson

Next Meeting: 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 23, 2014 at Museum of Vancouver

President's Notes

Writing history, it is said, is about telling stories. Elizabeth O'Kiely, a longtime member of the Vancouver Historical Society (VHS) until she passed away in 1999, wrote one such story about the contributions of her uncle and father, Mick and Duncan Bell-Irving, to the First World War. The book is called *Gentleman Air Ace: The Duncan Bell-Irving Story*, and followed Elizabeth's earlier, very successful history of Crofton House School.

I like *Gentleman Air Ace* for two reasons. The first is that it reminds me of "Liz" O'Kiely, a person who was very generous to me while I was researching the Bell-Irving family history and who made a huge contribution to community and cultural affairs in Vancouver. Active on the boards of the Community Arts Council and the city's museum, archives, and heritage societies, she helped convince the Vancouver government to build a city museum as its Canadian centennial project. She was a founding member of the Friends of the City Archives and was honoured by the VHS in 1978 for her work in preserving local buildings.

But I also like *Gentleman Air Ace* because of the story it tells. The Bell-Irving men were among the first pilots to fly planes as instruments of war. Canada did not have an air force, so Mick and Duncan joined the British Flying Corps (RFC) in 1915 and 1916 respectively. Airplane technology was so new, that when Mick began flying — the first Canadian in the RFC — planes were unarmed and used only for reconnaissance. Writes Liz O'Kiely: "Pilots usually carried revolvers in case they were forced down in enemy territory, but there was no serious fighting in the air... handguns were sometimes used to take potshots at the enemy." By 1916 both men were flying planes that were armed, and Duncan emerged, like the more famous Billy Bishop and Billy Barker, as one of the early "war aces." Both were shot down more than once — in Duncan's words, "I seemed to crash quite a lot" — and while they survived the war, Mick's health was seriously compromised and he lived the rest of his life in pain. I wonder how many other VHS members have First World War stories handed down through family lore?

Bob McDonald, President
bobmcdonald@vancouver-historical-society.ca

Tosca Trasolini & the Flying Seven

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women strong enough to fly with safety? Are they fitted temperamentally to operate aircraft?"

Tosca tried to enlist in the Canadian Air Force during World War 11, but she and the other six women were swiftly rejected.

Rather than remain grounded, the Flying Seven used their remarkable skills and determination to contribute to the war effort. They raised enough money through stunts to pay for eight planes for the flight training school in Vancouver.



Tosca Trasolini in 1939

Photo: Courtesy Angela Stephens

Tosca didn't just smash ceilings to become one of the country's first female aviators. She was also a natural athlete, breaking records in track and field, baseball, basketball and lacrosse. She held the women's discus record for British Columbia in the 1930s and qualified for the Summer Olympic Games.

Legend has it that she once humiliated all the young men in the tight-knit Vancouver Italian community when she was the only one who could shinny up a greased pole to collect the cash at the top.

Tosca was Angelo Branca's secretary for 20 years — the lawyer and later Supreme Court Judge that *Canadian Lawyer* once rated as the most famous criminal defense lawyer in Canadian history.

Tosca moved to Los Angeles in 1949 and lived there until her death in 1991.



Authors Invited to Participate in Christmas Book Sale

As part of our November 27 meeting featuring author and historian Jean Barman, we are inviting our other author/members to participate in our first Christmas Book Sale. Set-up starts at 6:00 p.m. and the sale will kick off at 6:30 p.m. and run for one hour. It's a great opportunity for our members to meet our authors, buy a signed copy for themselves, or do some Christmas shopping. If you would like to sign up for one of our limited spots at the table, please contact Eve Lazarus at info@vancouver-historical-society.ca. and write "Book Sale" in Subject field. Please note that authors are responsible for their own books and cash book sales.

Sponsorship Opportunity

To offset increasing costs, the Vancouver Historical Society is looking to sponsor the eight lectures we offer in a year.

Our lecture costs include honoraria, venue rental, insurance and, in some cases, travelling expenses. The sponsorship is \$1,000 and the sponsor will receive recognition for the gift at each meeting and in the society's publications. A tax receipt will also be issued.

For further information, please contact Bob McDonald or Michael Kluckner at info@vancouver-historical-society.ca using "sponsorship" in the subject field.

Help with Newsletter Mailing

The Society is looking for a volunteer or group of volunteers to mail out the newsletter at the beginning of each month. The task basically involves picking up a box of newsletters (about the size of a box of envelopes) from a downtown location, stuffing them into envelopes that have been labelled (as provided by our Membership Director) and stamped, and delivering them to a Canada Post mailbox. The time involved is typically around 3-4 hours per month. Training will be provided, and you will be reimbursed for the cost of envelopes and stamps. Please contact the info-line (604-878-9140).

Welcome New VHS Members

Keith Evans

Della Roussins & George Evans

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, November 27, 2014

French Canadians in British Columbia

Speaker: Jean Barman, historian, author, Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia

From the end of the 18th to the middle of the 19th centuries, the fur trade on the Pacific slopes brought with it French as the everyday language of commerce. Many family names in First Nation communities have French origins. The same is true of names of many geographic features in the West. The predominance of the French language is not commonly known as many of its speakers in past centuries left very few first-person narratives depriving subsequent generations of the French fact. Today, French speakers make up less than 2% of the population of B.C. Learn more from Jean Barman, whose latest book is entitled, *French Canadians, Furs, and Indigenous Women in the Making of the Pacific Northwest*.

Thursday, January 22, 2015

Roedde House and West End Stories

Speaker: Chris Stocker

Neighbourhoods are defined by their location within a city, the people who live there and their occupations, and the architecture 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.



Tosca Trasolini and the Flying Seven

by Eve Lazarus



Six of the Flying Seven ca. 1940 (Tosca Trasolini is second from the right)

Photo: City of Vancouver Archives CVA 371-987

Because October is Women's History Month, it seems fitting to feature the Flying Seven-- Vancouver's first group of female pilots. The following is an excerpt from Sensational Vancouver's Legendary Women chapter.

It was a cold drizzly November morning in 1936 when 25-year-old Tosca Trasolini climbed into the cockpit of a Fairchild bi-plane, secured her helmet, adjusted her flying goggles, rolled the bi-plane down the runway and

disappeared into the fog. As one of the Flying Seven, Canada's first all-female aviators' club, she was the first to fly in the dawn-to-dusk patrol.

The women took turns flying over Vancouver in 25-minute stints in two Fairchild's, a Golden Eagle, two Fleets, and two Gypsy Moths. They were trying to make the point that a woman's place was in the air.

Besides Tosca, the club included Margaret (Fane) Ruthledge, Rolie Moore, Jean Pike, Betsy Flaherty, Alma Gilbert and Elianne Roberge.

The club formed in 1935, after Margaret Fane flew to California to meet with Amelia Earhart, president of the Ninety-Nines—an American organization for women pilots.

There weren't enough experienced women pilots to form a chapter here, so the Canadians started their own.

The newspapers of the time called them the "Sweethearts of the Air," "flying flappers" and "Angels," defying what a *Chatelaine* article had asked a few years earlier: "Are

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

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Vancouver Historical Society Information Line: 604-878-9140
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 3071 Vancouver, BC V6B 3X6
Website: www.vancouver-historical-society.ca
Newsletter Editor: jmcgraw@vancouver-historical-society.ca