

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

ISSN 0042 - 2487

September 2013

Vol. 53 No. 1

Deadlines: Obits of Memorable British Columbians Speaker: Tom Hawthorn

From time immemorial, humans have retained the memory of the dead through monuments and oral stories which have long since disappeared. Since that time when oral tradition gave way to the written word, honouring the dead always had to have the same purpose, to ensure the spirit of the dead stays within and becomes part of the continuing collective historical narrative.

Some appear in name only such as on tombstone epitaphs, which merely hint at the lives of those interred. Those belonging to groups or organizations are remembered through necrologies. With the democratization or leveling of societies, an account of a person's life plus the announcement of whatever ceremony will send him or her on his way, generally known as an obituary, has become the favoured way to remember the deceased. In newer smaller areas where newspapers are more localized, the common man has a very good chance of becoming part of the larger historical narrative.

Only in a small town, for example, would an 1886 obituary rail against the evils of becoming "a freethinker" with the warning to the potentially wayward readers of the newspaper that the deceased got that way from "reading books...and hearing lectures."

Apparently in his last hours, however, he "called for mercy".

Another in the *Vancouver Sun* a few years ago noted that the deceased drank too much, smoked too much, used loud salty language

too often, but she was an all-round wonderful person and would be missed.

At our September talk, you'll hear some of the best, the funniest, and the most memorable of the passing parade of characters who make life in British Columbia so remarkable. Obits about British Columbia's departed not only reflect lives of an interesting cast of characters but also reveal the fullness of our history. The cast includes

athletes, authors, warriors, scholars, innovators, trailblazers, writers, boxers, cowboy singers, politicians and murderers. Their nicknames — Baby Face, Mean Gene, Alberta Slim, Professor Midas, Cougar Lady — hint at lives rich in anecdote. They also turn on its head the polite, canned version of our history.



September Speaker Tom Hawthorn

Photo: Deddeda White

September's speaker Tom Hawthorn is a reporter and columnist editor who writes for many newspapers and magazines, including the *Globe and Mail*, *Reader's Digest*, and *The Tyee.ca*. He is also heard on CBC Radio. The Victoria writer is the author of "Deadlines: Obits of Memorable British Columbians," released by Harbour Publishing in 2012. The book may be available for sale before and after the talk.

Bruce M. Watson

Next Meeting: 7:30 p.m., Thursday, September 26, 2013 at Museum of Vancouver

President's Notes

I have studied Vancouver history off and on for many years but am always amazed at what I do not know.

This fact became clear in late July as a dozen members of the Society completed a delightful Saturday morning walk through the neighbourhood of Grandview west of Commercial Drive, the area down the slope from Grandview Park. Led by VHS member and Grandview resident Maurice Guibord, the walk illustrated the complex built heritage and historical experiences that define lower Grandview as a distinctive corner of Vancouver.

We started at Mosaic Creek Park, located at Charles Avenue and McLean Drive, a park created from several vacant city lots in the 1990s. At the centre is a mosaic constructed by over 500 volunteers working with two local artists. Flowing along the ground through the park's centre in the form of a stream, the mosaic through its myriad images tells local stories, some reflecting eastside political sentiment.

One of the neighbourhood's most intriguing stories is that of boxer Jimmy McLarnin, a local athlete known by names such as Belfast Spider and Irish Lullaby who in the 1920s reigned as the welterweight champion for one year, won dozens of fights, and retired at age 28 worth half a million dollars.

Not far from his house on William Street is another on the busy First Avenue that displays Japanese-style bell-cast eaves and was once home to Won Alexander Cumyow, the first person of Chinese descent born in Canada. Cumyow went on to become a prominent Chinese court interpreter and labour contractor.

I was truly blown away, however, by the cluster of beautifully maintained pre-World War I houses on Odium Drive, between the Britannia Community Centre and Clark Drive. How can those of us on the field trip forget seeing, from the inside, the high-end construction details of the house that owner Rob Mitchell has restored with incredible care, from original art glass windows to intricate wood mouldings to a reinstalled oak fireplace?

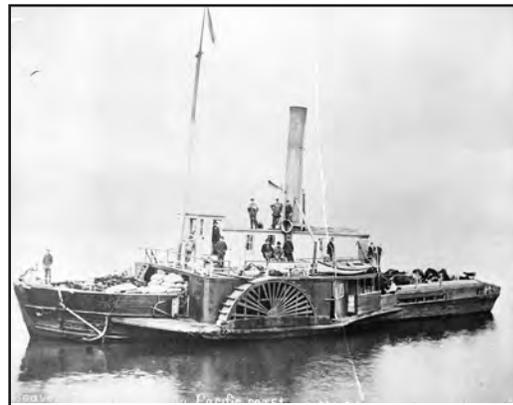
The visit to Grandview west of Commercial illustrated to me the value of Vancouver Historical Society field trips as an engaging way to expand our sense of Vancouver. I have become a field trip convert.

Bob McDonald, President
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Prospect Point Lighthouse Keeper

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Opportunity presented itself first with a tragedy. On July 25, 1888, three years after the Grove family arrived in Britannia Bay, the historic steamship *Beaver* slammed into rocks at Observation Point, known today as Prospect Point. The first steamship on the West Coast, the iconic *Beaver* was first used as a floating trade post by the Hudson's Bay Company then transferred to the Royal Navy in 1863. Later she was sold to the British Columbia Towing and Transportation, used for towing barges, log booms, and sailing vessels. On that fateful night in July her crew, drunk, ran the venerable ship aground at the



The steamship Beaver.

Photo: City of Vancouver Archives LGN 664

point. It was hardly the first ship to reach her end on the rocky outcropping. A swirling torrent of fresh water from the Capilano River poured into the salty Juan de Fuca Strait directly across from the rocks, and many ships had come aground. But the loss of such a beloved vessel convinced the fathers of the newly formed city that something must be done, and done soon.

So it was that on September 31, 1888, just two months after the wreck of the *Beaver*, and only four days after the grand opening of Stanley Park, the lighthouse at Prospect Point was established. John Grove was named as its keeper.

Years later, writer Constance Brissenden would say of Grove's tenure as keeper "One of the lowest paid workers in Vancouver, he received \$25 per month but his station was coveted for its free housing and use of two acres in Stanley Park." Such factors likely prompted John and Lucy to sell their property at Britannia and set up their small cottage on the rocks at Prospect Point.

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Welcome New VHS Members

J. Kyle Bienvenu
Joan Fisher

Leanne Edmiston
Michael Francis

G. Michael Shepard

Prospect Point Lighthouse Keeper

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Conditions were less than ideal. Marine agent James Gaudin inspected the light station in March of 1889, noting in his report “there are only two living rooms at this station, and the condition of these people can be imagined.” Of daily concern was the flooding of the cellar. At high tide, water would gush in and out of the house’s foundation. Despite the cramped accommodations, Gaudin was impressed with the Groves and the “very fair condition” of the light station. He ordered six barrels of concrete with which to lay a floor and the construction of boathouse.

Day to day life at the lighthouse was busy. During inclement weather the Groves slept in shifts in order to wind the fog bell every half hour. Even when funds were made available for an assistant, Lucy Grove still had two rambunctious sons to attend to, and a number of unusual household duties such as removing barnacles from boat bottoms and stacking containers of flammable mercury, used to reflect the flame of the light house. As for the boys, John Henry and Willis, they kept a number of pets including a deer they collared, a three-legged dog named Toby, and a cockatoo given to the Grove boys by a sea captain. Given its origin, the cockatoo had a rather colourful vocabulary that John Henry and Willis found hilarious but their mother, Lucy, found less so. She ultimately donated the bird to the Stanley Park Zoo. The boys played with the harbour seals, and explored the park as well as the wreck of the Beaver, which languished on the rocks for another 15 years before being towed and scuttled. The boys learned to sail and, when old enough, wound the foghorn and tended the light. Although the annual salary was meager, the Grove family was kept in fine supply of free firewood and nearby freshwater, as well as food from the heavy salmon run. It was a good life.

To Be Continued in the October Newsletter

Author’s note: The story of John Grove was first brought to my attention by his great-great grandson, Bryce Daynard. While studying Grade 10 Social Studies, Bryce generously shared his personal connection to Riel, the North-West Uprising, and the Prospect Point Lighthouse. Much thanks goes to Bryce, as well as Janet and Pat Grove and the Grove family for the contribution of their personal accounts and private family photographs. Thanks go, too, to Sharon Walz and Jill Teasley of the Vancouver Archives for their tremendous knowledge and assistance.

About the author: Jenise Boland earned her Master of Education at Cambridge before accepting a post teaching History, Law and Social Studies in Vancouver. Co-author of many textbooks and teaching resources, Ms. Boland makes her home in Arbutus Village with her young son, Joah, and their fish, Walter.

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, Oct. 24, 2013

Liquor, Lust and the Law

Speaker: Aaron Chapman

From the time the Italian immigrant Filipone brothers opened the Vancouver Penthouse Nightclub in 1947, the after hours watering hole on Seymour Street became a friendly escape for everyone from world famous entertainers to some of the city’s most notorious. Discover its colourful history involving vice squads, politicians, judges, and the underworld. It’s a unique look at some of Vancouver’s history after dark.

Thursday, Nov. 28, 2013

The History of Theatre in Vancouver

Speaker: Jerry Wasserman

From the earliest theatres and opera houses mainly for vaudeville to an explosion of Vancouver and BC-based original theatre of the 1970s and 80s, to today, Vancouver’s theatre history is explored by our speaker, an actor and author of several books on Canadian theatre and a professor of English and Theatre in the Department of Theatre and Film at the University of British Columbia.

Thursday, Jan. 23, 2013

Suspect Properties: Liquidation of Japanese-Canadian Property during WWII

Speaker: Jordon Stanger-Ross

When people of Japanese origins were uprooted from B.C.’s west coast in 1942, they were assured Canada’s Custodian of Enemy Property would “protect and preserve” their homes and farms for the duration of the war. By the spring of 1943, the government was selling all Japanese property. What had changed? Were the assurances of 1942 deliberate lies? Was it an attempt by racist British Columbians to rid the province of the Japanese, once and for all?

Manning Prospect Point's Lighthouse

by Jenise Boland

The Lighthouse at Prospect Point is celebrating its 125th anniversary along with Stanley Park. John Grove was the first – and only – keeper of the light.

When John Grove arrived in British Columbia in 1885, he was already a participant in iconic Canadian history. A gasfitter by trade, he had enrolled in the Northwest Mounted Police just prior to an uprising in the North-West Territory (today parts of Saskatchewan and Alberta). Metis leader Louis Riel had returned, and fear of another rebellion prompted Ottawa to recruit reinforcements.

Grove was sent to Frog Lake, Saskatchewan (now in Alberta), where on April 2, 1885, a Cree raiding party attacked the small town. Nine settlers were killed. Following the 'Frog Lake Massacre' the NWMP were sent in to capture the Cree leader, Wandering Spirit, and hang him. Grove's role in the endeavor is unknown, but his contribution was such that in September of that year the Canadian government issued him a land grant following his discharge from the NWMP. "John Grove, of Montreal," reads the official documentation "elects to accept land warrant for his services in the late rebellion."

Born in London, England, in 1864, Grove had sailed for Canada when he was eleven years old. Arriving in Montreal, the hard working boy was soon apprenticed to a gasfitter, and eventually earned the title himself. By nineteen he was already a widower, his young wife having died without children. Single again and

perhaps looking to leave behind his life in Montreal, Grove was lured into the NWMP with the promise of adventure and good pay — a hard working constable could move up quickly through the non-commissioned ranks. By the time of his release, Grove had gone from earning the base pay of 50 cents a day as constable to 85-90 cents a day as an artillery officer. Grove recognized an opportunity when he saw it. He took the land grant and his new wife, the former Miss Lucy Hall, and headed out west to a rugged stretch

of property on Britannia Beach, along Howe Sound.

They didn't keep the property for long, however. Within two years of arriving in Britannia Beach, two sons were born, John Henry and Willis Lloyd. Conditions were hard and the property was isolated. Because Grove didn't work at the nearby mine, the family wasn't entitled to buy supplies at the local general store. All supplies — food, furniture, and fuel — had to be brought in by boat from the Gastown harbour of the newly christened city, Vancouver. Unfortunately for Grove this meant a journey via rowboat, jerry-rigged with a makeshift sail.

With a young family to support and little in the way of amenities, it's easy to understand why the Groves might have been on the look out for a new situation.

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John Grove (third from left) with wife Lucy (second from left) receiving the Imperial Service Medal in 1928 for his 38 years of service as the Prospect Point Lighthouse keeper.

Photo: Leonard Frank from Grove family collection

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