

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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Curt Lang's Vancouver 1937-1998

February Speaker: Claudia Cornwall

The resiliency and creativity of Vancouverites never ceases to impress. The story of the multifaceted and talented

Curt Lang is a recognizable example of a Vancouver intellectual trying to be true to himself while drawing on all his creative energies to stay alive in a developing city. Curt's life energetically paralleled the evolving history of Vancouver

from the hip subculture years to the electronic postmodern 1990s. His interests spanned many worlds. As a teenager, he met Malcolm Lowry and became friends with Al Purdy with whom he went off to Europe. Previously unpublished correspondence between Al Purdy and Curt Lang reveals much about both their characters. In his twenties, Curt Lang was a beat, who published poetry and painted. He was friends with many in Vancouver's creative community — poets Peter Trower, John Newlove, and Jamie Reid; artists Red Douglas, David Marshall, and Roy Kiyooka and musician Al Neil.

Moving with the times, Lang became a street photographer in the early 1970s and was a member of the Leonard



Curt Lang photo of Granville Street in 1972

Frank Memorial Society of Documentary Photographers, along with Nina Raginsky, Fred Douglas, Tod Greenaway and Rod Gillingham. (The National Gallery of Canada's Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography purchased some of his prints.)

In his thirties, Lang built boats and fished. When the money in that industry was good, the scene in

Prince Rupert was like a Gold Rush. In his forties, he became involved in the high-tech industry, where he was awarded two patents, and started several companies. He also developed hardware and software for the railroad industry that today is used all over North America.

Based on conversations over a twelve-year period, Claudia Cornwall's book on Curt Lang is introduced by Curt's brother Greg, who, like his brother, did anything one could in those days to stay alive in the city. The book includes many of Lang's previously unpublished poetry, drawings and photography as well as a portfolio of forty rare 1972 Vancouver photographs. Twelve thousand of

his photographs are housed in the Vancouver Public Library Special Collections.

Award-winning Claudia Cornwall, who grew up in Vancouver and studied philosophy at the Universities of BC and Calgary, has been a freelance writer for more than twenty years. She teaches courses at



Claudia Cornwall

Photo: claudiacornwall.com

Simon Fraser University and Douglas College.

Bruce M. Watson

Next Meeting: 7:30 PM, Thursday, February 28, 2013 at Museum of Vancouver

President's Notes

There were a lot of happy people on January 19, 2013 — the night the first games of the 2012-2013 NHL hockey season were played after a months-long labour disruption. There is something about hockey and Canadians that makes the game an inescapable aspect of our winter experience. This thread in our national tapestry has been in place for a long time, and we here in Vancouver are not immune to its charm, as the fevered pitch of Canuck fans rises as the season progresses and the closer we get to winning the Stanley Cup.

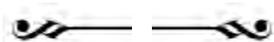
This year the Canucks will unveil their new alternate jersey, a reproduction of the only Vancouver hockey team to have won the Stanley Cup, the Vancouver Millionaires. In late March of 1915 the Vancouver Millionaires hosted and beat the Ottawa Senators three games out of three, outscoring their opponents by a series total of 26-8. The Millionaires of 1915 later found seven of its players in the Hockey Hall of Fame, including the legendary Frederick Wellington "Cyclone" Taylor.

I recently had the pleasure of reliving those three exciting games through Craig Bowlsby's *Empire of Ice: The Rise and Fall of the Pacific Coast Hockey Association, 1911-1926*.

Supported in part by a research grant from the Society, the book is a fascinating read, effectively evoking the mood and tenor of the bitter rivalries and hard-fought battles, both on and off the ice. Tracing the genius of the Patrick brothers, Frank and Lester, in their establishment of the Pacific Coast Hockey Association, it is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of hockey in Vancouver, and across the Pacific coast.

I've had the honour of seeing the fruits of a number of historical projects the Society provided grants to, and *Empire of Ice* is a welcome addition to the collection. (And, of course: Go Canucks!)

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



BCHF Conference in Kamloops

The British Columbia Historical Federation's (BCHF) annual conference May 9th to May 11th promises to be another exciting event for historians, researchers, and anyone with an interest in B.C. history. The event has been dubbed "Historic Grasslands 2013" to reflect this year's location in Kamloops.

As always, many interesting presentations, workshops and field trips have been organized. Presentations include the history of the surrounding and changing grasslands, and histories of local ranching and mining. Workshops include topics about blogs and wikis on the internet and how it relates to history. There will also be workshops on copyright for digital and print media, and how to develop a tour guide program. Field trips include a tour of the Land Titles Office, several museums and even a heritage train ride.

The BCHF looks forward to seeing members of affiliated historical societies (like the Vancouver Historical Society) at the conference. For more information about the complete agenda, fees, accommodations, please visit the BCHF website at: www.bchistory.ca/conferences/2013

Incorporation Day Luncheon

This year's Vancouver Historical Society Incorporation Day Luncheon will be held on Sunday, April 14th, 2013, at 12 noon at the University Golf Club, 5185 University Boulevard. The Luncheon is an annual event, commemorating the April 6, 1886 incorporation of the City of Vancouver.

There will be door prizes, a featured speaker, the Award of Merit presentation, and as always, a terrific menu. The Luncheon is also a fun opportunity for members and friends to meet others in the community who are interested in the history of Vancouver.

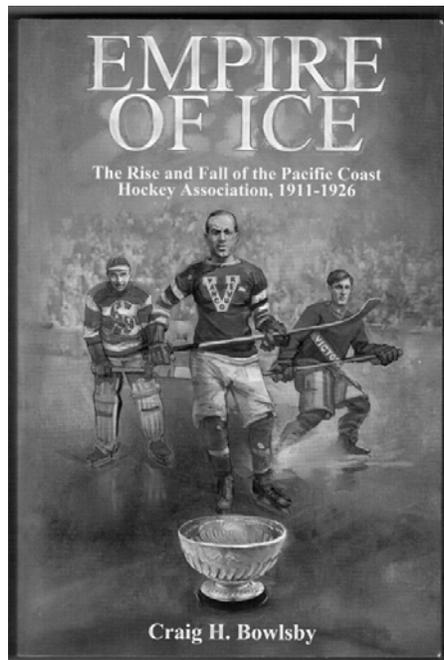
This year's speaker will be actor Jackson Davies, in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the debut of the television show "The Beachcombers."

We would like to have a good advance estimate of attendance so please buy your tickets early. Tickets for the Luncheon will be \$35 each and you will be able to buy them at the February and March monthly meetings, or by mail. For mail orders, please send a cheque to: Vancouver Historical Society, PO Box 3071, Vancouver BC, V6B 3X6, Attn: Luncheon.

Katie Adkins

Vancouver Hockey History

Craig H. Bowsby launched his well-written and thoroughly researched ***Empire on Ice: The Rise and Fall of the Pacific Coast Hockey Association, 1911-1926*** at the Vancouver Public Library on Monday, January 21st to an enthusiastic audience. For hockey fans and Vancouver history buffs, the book is now available at several bookstores around Vancouver. The Vancouver Historical Society provided Craig with money for research and publication. The book is certainly a welcome addition to the city's narrative.



BCHF's Online History Bookstore

Many interesting books have been written on various facets of British Columbia history but they are not always available at your neighbourhood bookstore. You may not even be aware of what *is* available. Now you can browse and order them online.

The B.C. Historical Federation's Website Book Store now features 87 books on many aspects of B.C.'s exciting and colourful history. Most books are self-published by different historical societies around the province. Check out the selection at www.bchistory.ca/publications/store/index then view the Book Store inventory. Books can be purchased online through the Federation's Paypal link.

Welcome New VHS Members

Brooke Campbell
Doris Helgren
David Witso

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, March 28, 2013

Alvo von Alvensleben: Vancouver's Flamboyant Entrepreneur

Speaker: Eve Lazarus

Alvo von Alvensleben, son of a highly placed German count, entrepreneur, and Vancouver booster of great flamboyance arrived in the city in 1904 with four dollars in his pocket. He became one of Vancouver's legendary and wealthiest characters. Rumours of him being a German spy forced Alvensleben to move to Seattle where he could not duplicate his Vancouver successes.

Thursday, April 25, 2013

Our Friend Joe: The Joe Fortes Story

Speaker: Lisa Ann Smith

When a young West Indian sailor named Seraphim "Joe" Fortes arrived in Vancouver in 1885 with little to his name, no one could have possibly guessed that one hundred years later he would be voted "Citizen of the Century." When Joe Fortes died in 1922, his funeral was the largest the city had seen and was attended by everyone from the city's elite to the most common soul. Learn more about this fascinating man whose name now adorns a city library branch as well as a renowned restaurant.

Thursday, May 23, 2013

Who Fed Vancouver? The Hidden History of the Chinese Canadian Food Industry

Speaker: Henry Yu

For most of Vancouver's history, much of the local produce came from farms and corner grocery stores operated by Chinese Canadians. Many Chinese Canadians were also employed as cooks working in neighbourhood restaurants, Shaughnessy mansions and on B.C. Ferries. Learn more about this fascinating aspect of local food distribution.

English Bay Joe

On the first day of this month, Canada Post unveiled a stamp honouring one of Vancouver's most beloved figures — Joe Seraphim Fortes.

Born 150 years ago on February 9, 1863 in Trinidad, Joe Fortes was in his mid-teens when he left home. After working in Britain for a number of years, the now 21-year-old Joe sailed from Liverpool on the *Robert Kerr* arriving in September 1884 in what would become Vancouver less than two years later.

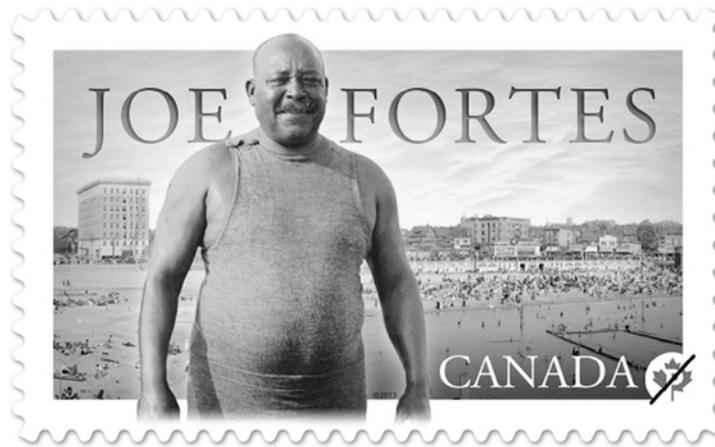
In the early rough and tumble days of Vancouver, Joe worked as a shoeshine boy, a porter and later a bartender. Being an avid swimmer, he spent much time at English Bay living in a tent during the warmer months and eventually moving into a modest beachside cottage. At a time when many Victorian-era Vancouverites barely got into the water, Joe started teaching local children how to swim.

Eventually he became the de facto caretaker and lifeguard on the beach until the city finally made it official in 1901. Credited with saving over 100 lives, Joe was honoured by the City of Vancouver in 1910 receiving a cheque and a gold watch.

Everyone knew “English Bay Joe” and he was greatly loved and respected by the people of Vancouver. When the city started razing the squatters’ shacks and cottages along

the beach, Joe’s many supporters insisted his cottage be spared. Indeed it was moved across the street close to today’s Alexandra Park near Bidwell Street.

Sadly he passed away from a bout with pneumonia at Vancouver General Hospital on February 4, 1922, just five days before his 59th birthday. His funeral procession (and mass at Holy Rosary church) was said to be the largest of its kind in Vancouver for many years to come. His grave marker at Mountain View Cemetery however, simply reads “Joe.”



Canada Post's Joe Fortes stamp designed by Lara Minja

Just a few years after his passing, the Joe Fortes Memorial fountain was built in Alexandra Park with much of the funding coming from pennies collected by children — many of whom had been taught to swim by Joe.

In later years, the Vancouver Public Library's West End branch was named for him as was a popular downtown restaurant.

The Vancouver Historical Society named Joe “Citizen of the Century” during celebrations marking the City of Vancouver’s centenary in 1986. (The VHS’ April talk will be about Joe).

This latest honour by Canada Post celebrates the 150th anniversary of Joe’s birth, in a land far from the city where this kindly modest man would become one of its legendary citizens.

Jim McGraw

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

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