The Vancouver Historical Society Newsletter

VHS

Preserving and promoting the history of Vancouver since 1936

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Valerie Jerome: An Engaged Life

By John Belshaw

Olympian and educator, political activist, and advocate for culture. Valerie Jerome is one of those people one might encounter in any of a number of roles without being aware of the full picture. And she's the Vancouver Historical Society's speaker in Black History Month.

The Jerome family moved from St. Boniface, MB to North Vancouver in 1951 where Valerie and her brother Harry soon discovered track and field. In this respect, the Jerome siblings were following in the very fast footsteps of their maternal grandfather, John "Army" Howard, the first Black Canadian Olympian – a sprinter at the 1912 Games. Ms. Jerome and her brother Harry were early members of the Vancouver Optimist Striders in 1958, a track club that produced dozens of Olympians over the years. One year later, Ms. Jerome literally leapt to public notice. She was 15, Canadian Senior Women's Champion in four events, and selected for the Pan American Games in the long jump, the relay (winning Bronze), and the 100 meters (finishing fourth). The following summer she ran the 100 metre dash at the Rome Olympics.

In 1964 Ms. Jerome got married and moved to Vancouver, where she spent a long and accomplished career as an elementary school teacher and a mentor to young athletes. Moving across the Vancouver School District, she became immersed in the various neighbourhoods of the city. A first posting at Selkirk in East Van was followed by stretches at Mount Pleasant (now the site of the Kingsgate Mall) and Quilchena School (where she started a track club with her then-husband, a project that took her to many corners of British Columbia). Stints at Begbie Elementary and Laura Secord, nine years at Simon Fraser Elementary, and a posting at Southlands exposed her to the city's many different ethnic and socio-economic communities. At Southlands Ms. Jerome mobilized Musqueam and settler students to investigate and become engaged in hearings to save the Endowment Lands (1985-1991). Subsequently at Wilfrid Laurier Elementary she and her students worked to preserve and extend the city's tree cover, a sign of her interest in a climate-resilient world. Legacies of those greening campaigns include a gingko tree at 41st and Vine and the city's tree preservation by-law.

Valerie Jerome, "Parker for Parks", **PHOTO COURTESY OF VALERIE JEROME.**

February Speaker:
Valerie Jerome

Ms. Jerome's political career got underway in 1978 when she ran with May Brown's TEAM slate as a Park Board candidate. She ran for office five times thereafter … at the civic, provincial, and federal levels, more often than not as a Green Party candidate. Her Green convictions led her to co-found Canadians for Ethical Treatment of Food Animals and to the federal Pesticide Review Hearings, where she made a presentation. She also appeared before the Canadian Radio and Television Commission to argue for the inclusion of Green Party leaders in federal and provincial debates. She was, also, a regular at City Council meetings, making early presentations in support of recycling and blue boxes.

Ms. Jerome's indefatigable commitment to community shows up elsewhere. Many Black History Month presentations across the city and two terms of teaching in Namibia since her 2001 retirement from Vancouver School District show that the education remains her calling. Bird watching, however, is her passion. And she has been a board member and director of dance companies, including

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NEXT MEETING: Thursday, February 27, 2020 at 7:30pm at the Museum of Vancouver

President's Notes

I started 2020 on a bad note, as readers of last month's newsletter will recall, by mixing up the order of the upcoming speakers. I blame Space Aliens, who briefly had control of my keyboard. The list of upcoming speakers we published last month and again this month is correct: Lara Campbell on Women's Suffrage in March, Henry Yu from the UBC Department of History in April.

April is also our annual Incorporation Day Luncheon at the UBC Golf Club, this year on the 5th, the day before the City's actual founding date of April 6th, 1886. Our planning is well underway, spurred on by past-president Scott and Amber Anderson who have generously agreed to organize it again. This is really the only "social" occasion we have in our calendar and it is something I look forward to, with a chance to mix and mingle, give away a pile of books, eat too much, and recognize our colleagues in the various museums and archives.

A highlight is presenting the Award of Merit, a tradition that began in 1974 when the University Women's Club received it for its preservation of the Hycroft mansion. Recipients have included authors of historical works – Chuck Davis, Irene Howard, John Atkin, Daniel Francis, Jean Barman, and Henry Ewert, to mention a few; some of our own – Ann Yandle, Elizabeth Walker, Bob McDonald, and Bruce Watson; collectors and professional archivists such as Dr. Wallace Cheung, Ivan Sayers, Sue Baptie, Joan Seidl, Leonard McCann, and Ron D'Altroy; and advocates, including Janet Bingham, Diane Switzer, Larry Wong and Marguerite Ford.

Conspicuously absent has been any member of our local Indigenous nations, and I am delighted that artist Susan Point will accept the award this year. I will reflect upon this further in next month's newsletter, and at the luncheon itself, but the lack of Coast Salish references on our urban landscape has diminished Vancouver, whose clear-cutting obsession extends from the earliest sawmill leases to the ongoing free-for-all erasing our historic buildings. Artists such as Ms. Point and her confrères – Sonny Assu and Brian Jungen come to mind – are adding an Indigenous stamp onto our polyglot, international culture that is brilliant and inspiring, reminding everyone of the true and complete history of this place.

Michael Kluckner
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Upcoming Speakers

The VHS invites everyone to attend our monthly talks. Admission for non-members is by donation. Talks are held at the Museum of Vancouver, 1100 Chestnut Street (in Vanier Park) at 7:30 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month except June, July, August and December.

March 26, 2020

The Women's Suffrage Movement in Vancouver

Speaker: Lara Campbell

Lara Campbell is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at SFU.

April 23, 2020

"A Seat at the Table:" History as a Forward-Looking Process

Speaker: Henry Yu

Professor Henry Yu is a member of the History Department of UBC and Principal of St. John's College, UBC. He is the author of *Journeys of Hope: Challenging Discrimination and Building on Vancouver Chinatown's Legacies.*

May 28, 2020

Film "The Bridge"

Speaker: George Orr, Veteran Broadcast Journalist

New VHS Members

Timothy Blackwell & Jacqueline Auclair
Maggie Chandler
James Cooke
Marnie & Richard Creed
Lori Herman
Lorel McLaren
Jenni Pace
Ross Schipper
Ingrid Wallace

Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2019 - 2020

(ELECTED MAY 23, 2019)

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the Goh Ballet Company, the internationally renowned Kidd Pivot Company, and Radical System Art. Ms. Jerome has also been a long-term volunteer with the Vancouver Writers' Festival. In 2010 she was an Olympic torchbearer in the Kootenays and she has been, for years, an advocate for sports opportunities among inner-city children. Ms. Jerome received the Canada 125 Medal in 1992 in recognition of her many contributions to the social, political, and cultural life of the country.

Whether on the track or on the hustings, Ms. Jerome has been running like few other Vancouverites. Ms Jerome jokes that she's not dead yet, despite the fact that two commemorative benches have already been dedicated to her: one in Stanley Park (a few meters away from Harry Jerome's statue) and another at Wilfrid Laurier School.

Her career (and her family's) many successes and accomplishments have not, however, insulated Ms. Jerome from the distinct experiences of Black British Columbians. As an athlete, educator, politician, and an advocate for the arts, she observes both the persistence of casual racism and the durability of systemic barriers to Black Vancouverites. In her February presentation to the VHS membership, the track star addresses Vancouver's track record and shows how its history of racism is part of a larger story.

Eleanor Collins in 2019 **PHOTO COURTESY OF JUDITH MAXIE**

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ard Collins in 1942, began a family and moved to Burnaby, where they were the first black family in the neighbourhood. When a neighbourhood petition circulated to prevent them from living there, Eleanor volunteered at her children's school and even taught music–facing racism and discrimination with generosity and humanity.

Eleanor is someone I would have wanted to learn about in school, who would have put a face to a local celebrity of colour, to reflect a city more diverse than the one in my recollections. To know that her 1954 variety show was groundbreaking as the first Canadian television show with a mixed-race cast, and the first live music TV show broadcast from Vancouver. The Eleanor Show represented the first female Canadian singer to have her own TV show, and the first black host on TV in North America. Why didn't I learn about her in school?!

As my parents reminded me, yes they know of Eleanor Collins, of course. But for my generation, I feel we've had to discover amazing locals through research or by chance… by chatting with people who know or who have lived it. One of our board members even had a personal encounter with the legend herself. On the same street that was petitioning her family's removal (something that's happened to my family members in Vancouver), he was selling raffle tickets for his Burnaby Minor League Hockey team - Mrs. Collins was the only one who donated to his cause. (He's never forgotten that act.) Classy and kind.

To celebrate black history in Vancouver (BC, Canada and beyond) we should continue to bring forth the experiences, truths, realities and complexities. I recently received inquiries from two young Canadians of African descent, empowered and motivated to contribute, to learn the history and share in its future. There is something palpable in the energy in this city; to move forward, include this history in the BC curriculum, to construct a physical space for the past and present, all these are tangible goals. Black history month is as impactful as we make it.

Incorporation Day Luncheon

Celebrating the founding of the City of Vancouver on April 6, 1886

Sunday, April 5th, 2020 at 12:30pm at the University Golf Club

Tickets are available online at www.vancouver-historical-society.ca, for sale at the February and March lectures by cash or cheque or mail a cheque to Vancouver Historical Society, Box 3071, Vancouver V6B 3X6 with names to attend.

Please join us for our annual celebration of Vancouver's birthday, featuring a sumptuous buffet lunch, book raffle, presentation of the Award of Merit to Musqueam artist Susan Point, and talk on theatre history by Jerry Wasserman.

Tickets are $40 members and guests. $50 non-members. Members may purchase non-member tickets at member price online.

How Do We Celebrate Black History Month in Vancouver?

By Jess Quan

What do I know of the history of African-Canadians? How can I speak of Black History Month? My exposure to African culture as a tstudent came from the French colonial history of Africa and the French Islands. I'm sure a link could have been made locally, to talk about the Vancouver experience, but it never was.

I do have one memory from elementary school that sticks with me to this day. We had a school talent show and I can only recall two of the performances. One was a classmate who performed Chinese Dance and another was an older student who played jazz/rock 'n roll on the piano. I was thrilled. It may have been the first time I had really paid attention to a jazzy piece of music- live. His family was in the audience and singing along, clapping and tapping. I was a bit in awe as my experience with live music was mostly classical and not interactive.

I distinctly remember the school staff/admin (someone) kept shushing them in a highly frustrated manner. It seemed odd to me that music that was meant to be enjoyed (in which a spontaneous dance session would have been appropriate) was not encouraged but suppressed. My young mind also sensed that the way they were being treated (that their behaviour was somehow disruptive) had something to do with the fact that they were black.

Eleanor Collins in performance circa early 1960s by Franz Lindner. **PHOTO COURTESY OF JUDITH MAXIE.**

Today I'm a big fan of classic jazz. But growing up in Vancouver, I was never aware of the local scene, its history, its nuances and ground-breaking women. My introduction to Eleanor Collins nee Proctor, Canada's "First Lady of Jazz", and now a member of the Order of Canada, came with a CBC Podcast from the Secret Life of Canada, and other articles marking her 99th birthday in 2018. And then not long after, a message from her family explaining that her history in Vancouver had been mis-represented and erroneously linked to Hogan's Alley (one of VHF's Places That Matter plaque sites).

Sixteen year old Elnora Proctor is in a well-known photo from Fountain Chapel (African Methodist Episcopal) on Jackson Street in 1935 when the Edmonton teen was on a trip to Vancouver visiting her friends who were part of the Fountain Chapel Choir. To mark the occasion, they asked her to sit in the photo. Elnora didn't officially move to Vancouver until 1939, marking her start with CBC Radio and changing her name to 'Eleanor'. And when she did, she lived with family in the West End, near Stanley Park, and also had relatives in the Dunbar area.

Elnora Proctor married Rich-

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