



Understanding Indigenous History

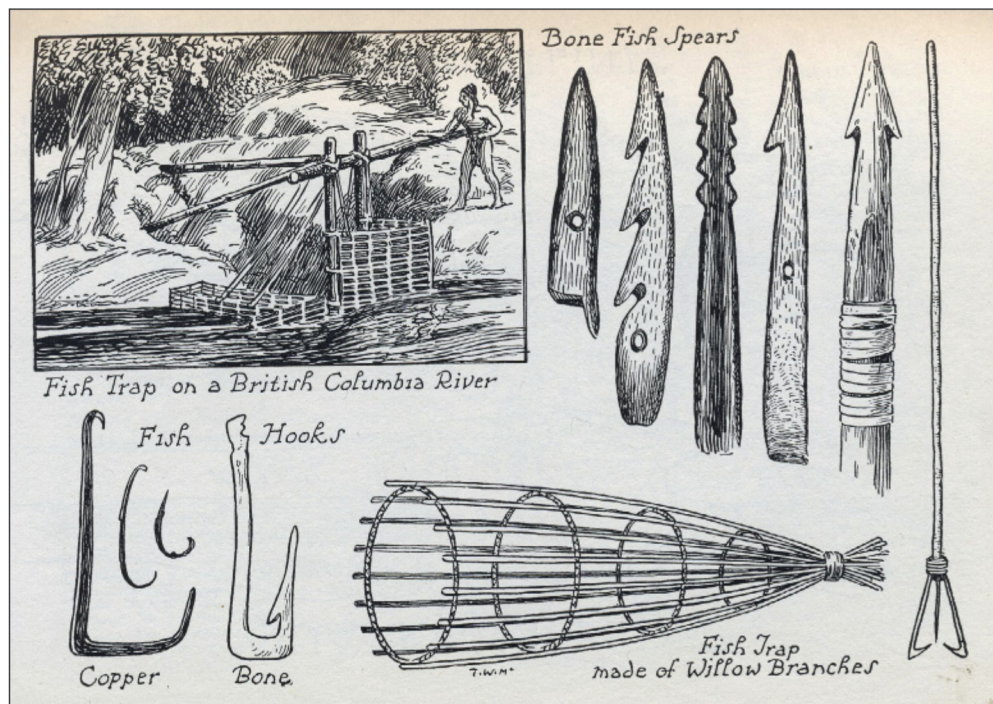
By John Belshaw

To say that Lee Maracle is a “prolific” writer doesn’t begin to capture the enormity of her work. It is said that she is the most published Indigenous woman writer in Canada but she may well be one of the most published writers in the country. Full stop. A dozen novels and works of non-fiction, three works of poetry, nearly two dozen articles and book chapters, plenty of edited works, and so many contributions to various projects that it is difficult to find among them the very local prize, “Goodbye Snaug.”

Maracle comes from a long and distinguished line. She is a member of the Stó:lō Nation. Chief Dan George was her grandfather. Born in North Vancouver, she has been publishing since her early twenties and challenging colonial visions of women and places all along the way. Her first book, *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, came out in 1975 and has been reprinted at least five times. In it, she establishes herself as voice for the decolonization of the feminine. The account is autobiographical and political and it confirms Maracle as someone who could articulate the experience of colonialism while retaining an optimism that a truly post-colonial world is possible.

Lee’s upcoming presentation to the VHS speaks to how we encounter colonialism in a colonized space like Vancouver. “Snaug isn’t a past injustice but an ongoing one,” she argues, making the point that the historical is current and still very much felt.

One of the challenges facing conversations about this history is that it is the system and ecology in which settler and Indigenous all reside. It’s like trying to explain to a fish that it is in water. “Colonization affects everyone,” Maracle argues.



Fish trap on a British Columbia River, drawing c. 1920 from the book *The Picture Gallery of Canadian History*. REPRODUCED FROM THE PICTURE GALLERY OF CANADIAN HISTORY, VOL I, 1942, RYERSON PRESS: TORONTO.

She draws an important distinction between the nation state (which is built on the concept of private property – and then depends on it) and territoriality ... an Indigenous way of seeing place as un-ownable. The rivers own themselves, the land owns itself. All we can do, within territory, is our best to nurture and preserve it.

For Maracle, this is the point of territorial acknowledgements. Rightly done and with authentic feeling, they recognize the thousands upon thousands of years of caretaking of the land that made it a place in which we – Indigenous and settler alike – could live. And in acknowledging that debt we place a duty upon ourselves to care for the land so that others in unknowable generations hence may live here as well.

Lee Maracle currently teaches in the Indigenous Studies and serves as Tra-

February Speaker: Lee Maracle

ditional Teacher for First Nations House Maracle served as a Distinguished Visiting Scholar at the Universities of Toronto, Waterloo, and Western Washington and Guelph University. Maracle received the J.T. Stewart award; the Premier’s Award for Excellence in the Arts; the Blue Metropolis First Nation’s literary award; the International Festival of Author’s award; the Anne Green award. Maracle received an Honorary Doctor of Letters from St. Thomas University, and an Honorary Doctor of Laws from University of Waterloo. She is the recipient of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee medal and is an Officer of the Order of Canada. Recently, Maracle was shortlisted for the Neustadt International Award.

President's Notes

Two recent development applications that came to the Vancouver Heritage Commission (which I chair) highlighted how much the landscape of the downtown has changed and how evidence of the Indigenous use of the area has been erased.

One was for an Indigenous housing and care centre at Hastings and Columbia, and last month there was a proposal by First United Church to redevelop with a mix of housing and social services on its site. The church evolved from a Presbyterian congregation and an "Indian church" along the waterfront to a wooden building erected in 1893 at Hastings and Gore. Its 1965 replacement is a curious modernist building whose use has evolved, as the Downtown Eastside changed, into a multi-use facility helping the homeless and afflicted, more than 40% of whom are Indigenous. In the Dirty Thirties, led by Rev. Andrew Roddan, the church provided meals and support for the indigent migrants flooding into the city and camping nearby, initially on the abandoned Hastings Mill site near the foot of Gore, then at the East End dump, which was rehabilitated as Strathcona park in the early 1960s and is now – again – Vancouver's tent city.

At Columbia Street, a ribbon of wetland called Lek'lek'i allowed Indigenous people to move canoes at high tide through to False Creek; that swampy land at Pender was unattractive to the mainstream White settlers but affordable for Chinese: ergo, Chinatown (and briefly the red-light district) located there.

The peninsula that settlers knew as the Hastings Mill site – where the VHS sponsored a sculpture in 1965 to celebrate the mill's centenary – was Kemk'em'elay, a "grove of [native] maple trees," with a longhouse and other seasonal uses. It is now behind chain link: the huge CenTerm container facility. Farther east, at Glen Drive, another high-tide passageway allowed canoes through into the tidal reaches of False Creek, an important source of food and a quick connection to the Squamish village of Sen'akw where the Creek opens into English Bay. Historians will be aware of the 1906 plan for a shipping port in False Creek east of Main Street, with a canal connecting to Burrard Inlet. Now it's railyards and warehouses.

These two new buildings will help interpret Indigenous history with sculpture and artwork; nearby – perhaps with plaques set in the sidewalks – Vancouver's ancient geography may emerge again.



Michael Kluckner
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Upcoming Speakers

The VHS invites everyone to attend our monthly talks, which are being held online by Zoom during the pandemic. If you are not a member of the VHS and would like to attend, please email presidentvhs@gmail.com to receive the log-on information. Members will receive complete information by email a few days before the lecture.

March 25, 2020, 7 pm

L'Histoire des Franco-Columbiens

Speaker: Maurice Guibord

The director general of the Société historique francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, Maurice Guibord, will describe the rich history and culture of French speakers in BC.

April 22, 2021

At The Bridge: James Teit and an Anthropology of Belonging

Speaker: Wendy Wickwire

New VHS Members

Teresa Bradley	Gina Leigh
Virginia Brown	Josh Lewis
James Carruthers	Jocelyn MacNeil
Viire Daniels	John Napier-Henry & Iona
Paula Dunford	Douglas
Thomas Dyer	Jillian Scarth
Barbara Forsyth	Sandra Schwartz
Mary Gerry	Shirin Theophilus
Douglas Harrison	Joan White
Jeannette Hlavach	Laurie Woolly
Jill Kelly	

Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2020 - 2021

(ELECTED MAY 28, 2020)

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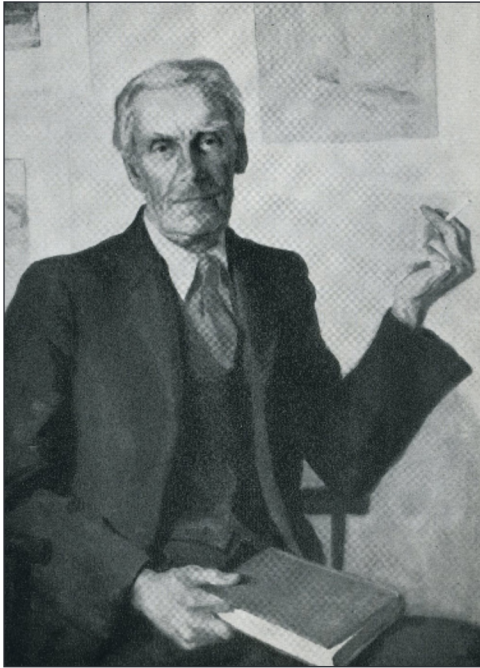
Appointed Positions

MEMBERSHIP	Mary Wallace Poole
VIDEOGRAPHY	Elwin Xie
NEWSLETTER MAILING	Jeannie Hounslow
NEWSLETTER DESIGN	Kellan Higgins

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Illustrating Canada for Schoolchildren



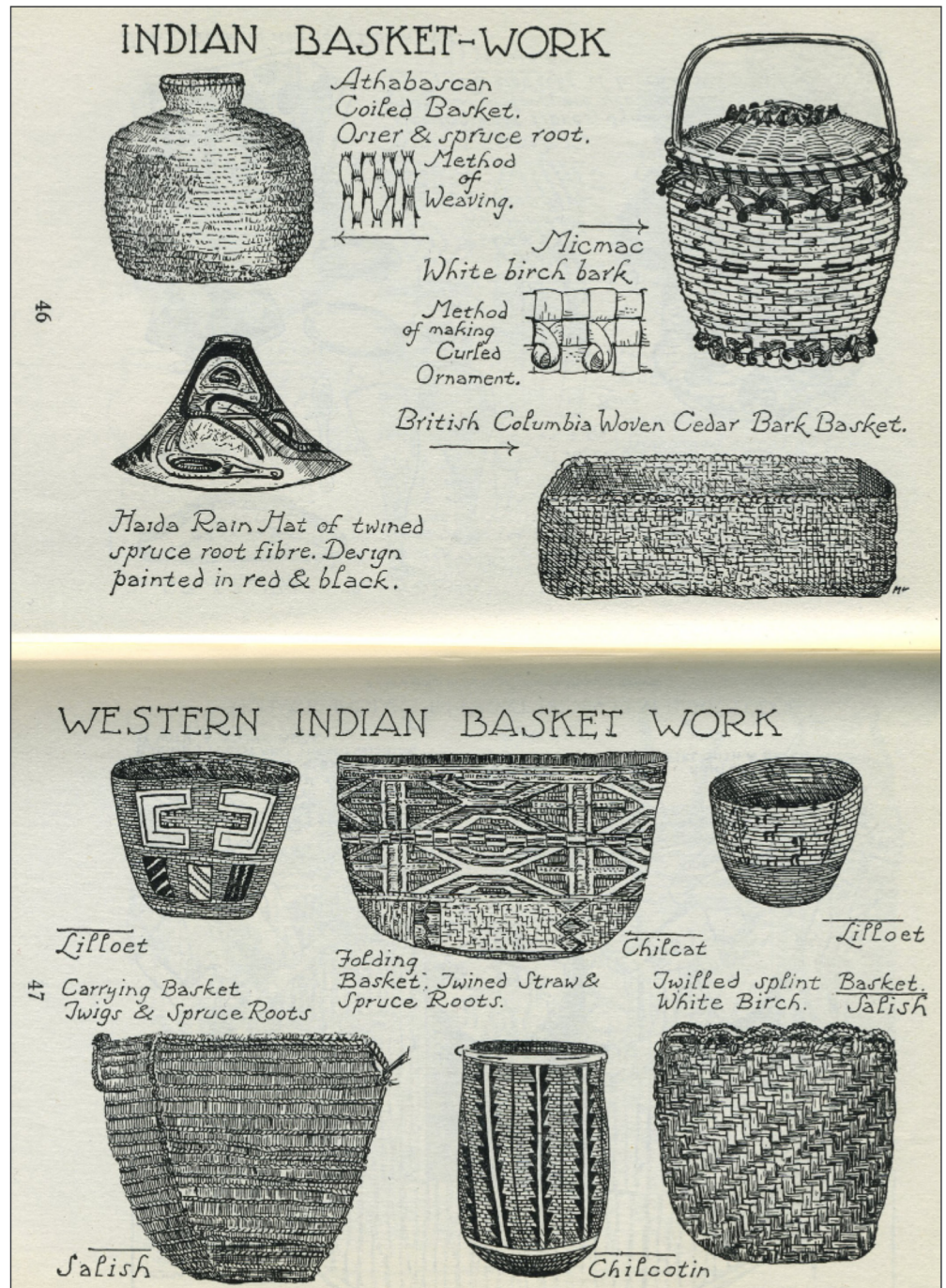
Charles W. Jefferys, portrait by Marion Long O.S.A. R.C.A. Undated. REPRODUCED FROM THE PICTURE GALLERY OF CANADIAN HISTORY, VOL I, 1942, RYERSON PRESS: TORONTO.

By Michael Kluckner

The drawings of Charles W. Jefferys, collected in the three volumes of *The Picture Gallery of Canadian History*, were part of the historical-education world I grew up in during the 1950s and early 1960s. Teaching through images seems like a 21st-century idea for the post-literate society, but in Jefferys's hand it was a powerful tool for creating historical awareness.

It is interesting today to apply the 21st-century lens of appropriation and colonialism onto his sympathetic and detailed drawings of Indigenous subjects, much as has happened with the expressionistic artwork of Emily Carr. Jefferys was as good a researcher as he was an illustrator, and filled pages of his books with artifacts and imagined scenes of Indigenous life across the country, a few of which are reproduced on these pages.

Jefferys (1869–1951) was born in England and settled in Toronto about 1880. Shortly after his death, more than 1,000 of his drawings were sold



to the Imperial Oil Company, which in 1972 donated the collection to the Public Archives of Canada. According to a plaque erected in his memory, he said “if my work has stirred any interest in our country and its past, I am more than paid.”

A two-page spread in Volume 1 of Jefferys's book on basket-work. Other pages include detailed drawings of snowshoes, canoes, moccasins, clothing, dwellings, skin dressing and meat drying, transportation methods, food gathering, weapons, dances, pipes, pot-

tery, cradles for children, and art, all divided down by regions of the country.

Whether contemporary scholars and Indigenous people would feel these images pass muster today is a good question. Doubtless some reflect his educated guess at life in a “vanished society.” It is intriguing to see a new generation of Indigenous artists illustrate their cultural memory in graphic novels, such as Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas' “Haida Manga” stories that synthesize Japanese cartooning techniques with his own vivid symbolism.

Militant Mothers of Raymur Overpass

By: Jessica Quan

If you've ever walked through the RayMur Housing Project in the old East End of Vancouver, in hopes of crossing the railway tracks to reach Lord Admiral Seymour Elementary or to the other side of Keefer Street, you have the "Militant Mothers" to thank for a safe crossing with a view. In January of 1971, after years of all talk and no action, a group of 25 neighbourhood mothers blocked the railroad tracks in order to get Canadian National (CNR) and Burlington Northern (BNR) railways to pay attention to their requests for a safer crossing. They went to Victoria and won their case and the crossing began construction in March of that year.

This piece of Vancouver history is 50 years old this year: a great article has been published by Carolyn Jerome in the Georgia Straight and footage from the original blockade can be viewed online. I came across this remarkable story thanks to its nomination as part of Vancouver Heritage Foundation's *Places That Matter* plaque project. VHF has a dedicated webpage to the history but has yet to install a plaque. The history has been commemorated in public art and videos, as well as a wooden archway that is currently a mystery- who installed it and how long has it been there?

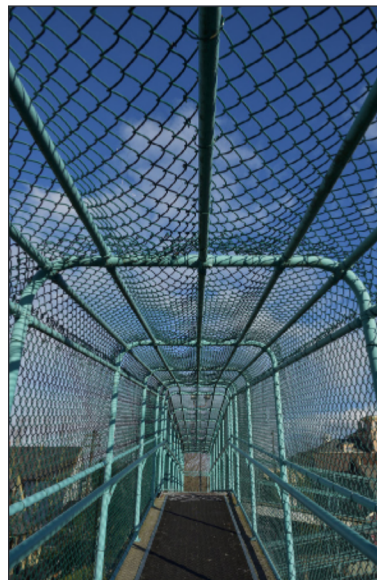
In 2014, *Heart of the City Festival* hosted a walking tour with Carolyn Jerome and a musical by Bob Sarti and Bill Sample entitled, "THE RAYMUR MOTHERS They Wouldn't Take No For An Answer". In 2019, the City of Vancouver officially changed the name of the bridge from the "Keefer Street Pedestrian Overpass" to the "Militant Mothers of Raymur Overpass" in honour of these women.

The *Places That Matter Community History Resource* website recently received a story submission from the son of one of the Militant Mothers. I think Dennis says it best:

"My mother (Siegrun Meszaros) was a Militant Mother. I was 6yrs old at the time living on the 12th floor on one of the towers. I remember crawling underneath the stopped railcars or climbing in between them just to get to school on time. I also remember a tent was pitched on the tracks and going to Victoria to protest.

The first winter after construction, was also memorable. I remember clinging onto the fencing going up as the walkway was frozen. You would slip and slide. Going down was fun if you had a piece of cardboard....weeeee

To this day when I pass by I get a smile from the accomplishment and the memories. My mother has since passed on (July 2018)....I know she was proud of all who were involved to make this happen. I am sure the overpass saved lives."



If you're not familiar with it, make a visit to the Raymur overpass, enjoy the wonderful view to the north, marvel at the children who crawled under freight trains to get to school in the morning, and reflect on a successful example of citizen activism

TOP PHOTO CREDIT: CITY OF VANCOUVER ENGINEERING

MIDDLE AND BOTTOM PHOTO CREDIT: ROAMING-THE-PLANET