



## Cycling as Transportation: the Recent History

Anyone familiar with Vancouver is likely well aware of the growing popularity and quality of urban cycling in the city over the past 20 or 30 years.

Within a generation, the common view of cycling in Vancouver changed dramatically. From the undignified activity of children, activists, and people living on the margins of society, cycling became a responsible transportation choice adopted by all manner of commuters as a healthy, sustainable, and affordable alternative to the motor vehicle.

Cycling is now a reasonable transportation option for anyone living in “The Greenest City”, as well as a top recreation activity for visitors. Vancouver boasts some of the most beautiful bike routes anywhere, as well as dynamic commuter routes that criss-cross the map. This golden age for “active transportation” has also meant a growing, lucrative, and mainstream market for the bicycle, cycling products, and services. Last but not least, it has nourished the aspirations of the many British Columbians who support this particular cultural manifestation in Canada’s third-largest metro area and express these feelings at the ballot box.

But how did it happen? How did we get over a million bike trips across the Burrard Bridge each year? How did Vancouver find the political courage to bring separated bike lanes downtown and make commitments to “all ages and abilities” cycling across the region?

Prevailing wisdom credits the transformation of our streets to the insights and initiative of legislators and bureaucrats. Policy changes and investments in cycling, transit, and walking in Vancouver have been great and impactful over many years, and existing narratives tell us that this only happens because we elect politicians who then hire and direct the activities of plan-



Granville Street looking north from about Dunsmuir Street, c.1900, with a 21st-century addition. Original photo from “Go By Bike Week: A Selection of Bicycle-Related Photographs,” by Bronwyn Smith, posted on May 27, 2021 on the excellent AuthenticCity (City of Vancouver Archives) blog. ORIGINAL DONATED BY ROBERT F. DONLEY IN 1959. CVA AM54-S4-:STR P361

ners and engineers...who then make it all happen.

If only it were that simple. Between the late 1950s and early 1980s urban design in Vancouver catered to the

dominance of motor vehicles. Instead of connecting communities with rapid transit, there was an almost uninterrupted bloom of freeways, bridges, and suburban sprawl.

Colin Stein, our next presenter, argues that the failure to deliver on new mobility in one era may have inadvertently opened the door to the active transportation of another and to an entirely new kind of social activism.

First, there was the failure to deliver on expectations of the regional vision. Yet, thanks to the fortuitous timing of the arrival of the 10-speed bicycle and then the mountain bike, new tools for mobility were available to almost anyone who wanted more than the car dependency on offer.

When Expo ‘86 happened, it brought new conditions for cycling. Thr

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This month's speaker:  
**Colin Stein**

## President's Notes

Our test to live-stream the January lecture onto YouTube worked well with 26 viewers (apologies to members who couldn't get in to the Zoom feed as our account maxes out at 100 registrants). Live-streaming will become our standard practice in coming months as an option for people who don't wish to come to the Museum of Vancouver for the in-person live event. Huge thanks are due to Elwin Xie for setting up the system; he will continue to craft archival copies of the lectures for our YouTube page.

It looks like the March 24th lecture will be the first one in-person + live-stream. As you can see to the right, we've had to shuffle the deck due to problems putting together the "Paradise" panel. And, sadly, we've had to cancel the Incorporation Day luncheon for the third year. We will definitely have a real party in 2023, or a giant picnic this summer.

Michael Kluckner, President

## Purchasing Speakers' Books

The Vancouver Historical Society is delighted to be partnering with Massy Books, a 100% Indigenous-woman-owned-and-operated bookstore at 229 East Georgia Street on the lands of the Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and sel̓wítulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, also known as Vancouver. Members will be able to get a whopping 20% off books by our monthly speakers\* upon entry of a code that will be included in our electronic mailouts.

Massy Books carries over 15,000 new and used books, which can be explored and purchased in-person or online. The store also reaches out to the community, hosting artists' shows and events, in particular, 'Indigenous Brilliance', a quarterly reading series for First Nations, Inuit and Métis writers in partnership with Room Magazine. Massy Books may be accessed online at <https://www.massybooks.com>.

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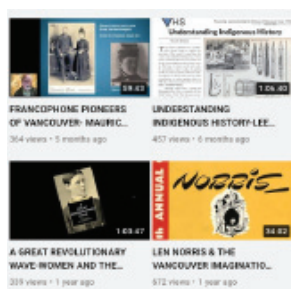
\*20% is only available for those picking up in-person, otherwise full shipping fees will be charged for mailout.

**Don't miss a lecture!** or ...

**Watch it again, Sam!**

Visit our archive online: search "Vancouver Historical Society on YouTube" to find our lectures going back to 2016

Elwin Xie, videographer



## Upcoming Speakers

Our February 24th lecture with Colin Stein will be a Zoom presentation with the option of watching it live on YouTube. The intention is to hold subsequent lectures live at the MoV, and also to stream them live onto YouTube. More details will follow in the March newsletter.

March 24, 2022, 7 pm, at the MoV

### A Long Way to Paradise

A panel of historians moderated by historian (and VHS program director) John Belshaw will discuss Bob McDonald's just-published political history of B.C.

March 24, 2022, 7 pm, at the MoV

### Aaron Chapman, Vancouver Vice

Best-selling author and raconteur of the city's underbelly Aaron Chapman will speak on his latest work focusing on the West End in the 1980s.

## Welcome New Members

|                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Rachel Alders     | Thomas Morton      |
| Derek Brackley    | Christina Musgrove |
| Patricia Carr     | Bob Nugent         |
| Alyssa Chang      | Wendy Panton       |
| Justin DeVries    | Dedeker Rondeau    |
| Rush Dhillon      | Peter Simpson      |
| John Grayson      | Christina Spencer  |
| Neville Hogsden   | Alexander Stad     |
| Aliya Tahir Kazmi | Colin Stein        |
| Nicholas Kenny    | Penny Street       |
| Jesse Labbe       | Natasha Tar        |
| Thomas Llewellyn  | John Whistler      |
| Marissa Lopez     | Rebecca Williams   |
| Amanda McRae      |                    |

## Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2021 - 2022

(ELECTED MAY 26, 2021)

|                           |                  |
|---------------------------|------------------|
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## Appointed Positions

|                            |                    |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| MEMBERSHIP                 | Mary Wallace Poole |
| VIDEOGRAPHY                | Elwin Xie          |
| NEWSLETTER MAILING         | Jeannie Hounslow   |
| NEWSLETTER TEMPLATE/LAYOUT | Kellan Higgins/MK  |

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# An activist's history of cycling in Vancouver

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Three decades after the interurban railway system was dismantled, 1985 saw the return of regional rapid transit service (the Expo Line) and, less celebrated at the time, its first cycling route (the BC Parkway). As the 1980s came to a close the city was positioned to embark on a quarter-century of truly extraordinary transformation that included the growth of human transit.

In his forthcoming book *Vanbikes: Vancouver's 30-Year Fight for Transportation Equity & Smart Growth Communities*, Stein chronicles the efforts of advocates inside and outside of local and regional government to make the bicycle a reasonable and supported mode of transportation. Stein brings into the spotlight the people, the cultural change, and the events that led to progressive transportation policies and infrastructure, as well as community cycling programs.

Stein describes the cast of characters among the early bicycle advocates. They included "oddballs handing out flyers on bike paths, the lone 'greenies' in city committee meetings, and the 'table-pounding, eye-rolling' activists blocking roads and bridges." They were mostly anonymous, sometimes representatives of cycling groups and non-profit organizations, and almost always volunteers. Their work would propel some into roles as NGO leaders, experts consulted by governments on sustainable transportation policies, and elected officials with influence over transportation policies, investments, and networks. He also tells the story of the government staff and elected officials who helped initiate these changes — allies of the environmental movement, of smart growth, and of community consultation.

Join us on the 24th of February as Colin Stein explores the factors, individuals, and movements that made Vancouver one of the best places to get around on two wheels.

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Colin Stein is a communications and marketing consultant who has lived and worked in Vancouver since 1995. He has spent the last decade working

## Bike People protest Cassiar

**Built at a cost of \$110 million, the Cassiar Connector is an automobile-only solution to Vancouver's growing traffic problem. To draw attention to the fact that bikes cannot pass through, the Bike People protested the opening.**

BY ANDY TELFER, SPEC DIRECTOR



**Above: a group of Bike People at the entrance to the Cassiar tunnel. This is the first and last time cyclists will be allowed through.**

I arrived at Cassiar and Hastings and found a group of about thirty Bicycle People already there. In twenty minutes this grew to about 75 riders and bikes, amidst the crowds of curious people out to inspect the new tunnel. A few traffic police asked us to stay off the sidewalk, but didn't seem too concerned about our presence. None of us knew exactly what was going to happen until one of the organizers, Richard Campbell explained the plan: to make our voices heard and then "the ride!"

We descended the yet unopened new roadway towards the tunnel where the public officials, media and official opening ceremonies were. Out came our banners "SHARE THE ROAD" and "STOP EXHAUSTING THE EARTH." As "Oh Canada" started the ceremonies, we started ringing our bells. Imagine what 30 bike bells sound like in a tunnel? Add to that chants such as "BIKE ACCESS

NOW" and "SHARE THE ROAD." The sound system on the stage received some stiff competition.

Close to the end of the speeches we started moving back to the tunnel entrance. The media came after us. BCTV, UTV, and many others stuck microphones in front of Richard who was shown on the news later that day, making comments, targetting automobile over-use.

People were now coming and going. I talked to a resident who was concerned with excess pollution and was even willing to have a pollution monitoring device placed on her property. I spoke with a man who was upset at

our noise, but who went away understanding that we felt petition signing and public meetings alone, were not enough.

I saw Vancouver Councillor Libby Davies wandering through the cyclists, and Vancouver Councillor, Gordon Price, head of the GVRD Bicycle Task Force had been noticed earlier on his bicycle.

After riding through that part of the tunnel not occupied by the stage, we assembled at Cassiar and Hastings, ready to take to the streets. Using one lane of traffic, we crossed the Second Narrows bridge to North Vancouver, followed by a City of Vancouver truck with a flashing arrow on top warning motorists to use another lane. But this just didn't seem to be enough. Taking two lanes would make a much bigger impact, so back over the bridge we went, this time using two traffic lanes, which we thought much more effective.

Deciding that this was not yet enough, we decided First Avenue was next on our route — minus a few North Shore cyclists. We occupied both lanes, from Cassiar to Commercial Drive, amidst honks from the road and cheers from the sidewalk. We turned north on "The Drive" where we graciously let a bus go ahead and then settled in for refreshments at La Quena.

Constructed exclusively for motorized vehicles, all proposals for cycle-ways in any part of the project were turned down.

Photo: Volker Bogedom

spectrum / Fall-Winter 1991/2 17

in and writing about active transportation, cycling advocacy, urban issues and politics, and expects to publish *Van Bikes* in print and online formats in summer 2022.

From *Spectrum Magazine*, Vol. 22 No. 1 Fall/Winter 1991/92, Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC). Photo by Volker Bogedom.



Detail of "Canadian Youth Hostel bike hike," showing the north end of the Burrard Bridge in July 1943. This is another photo from the delightful AuthenticCity blog referenced in the photo caption on the front page.

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEFFENS-COLMER LTD. CVA AM1545-S3-: CVA 586-1342



# Joe Fortes: a 100th anniversary tribute

By Lisa Anne Smith

Co-author of

*Our Friend Joe: The Joe Fortes Story*

On February 4, 1922, Joe Fortes passed away in Vancouver General Hospital, just days before his (approx.) 57<sup>th</sup> birthday. Gravely ill with pneumonia, he had been ambulated to the facility a few weeks earlier at the insistence of caring friends. He died peacefully with his longtime friend Cassie Howard by his side.

All Vancouverites were shocked that such a seemingly robust, strong and healthy man could have been taken from them so suddenly. Joe had been a local legend on the English Bay waterfront since the latter half of the 1880s, keeping watch as lifeguard and teaching three generations of Vancouver children how to swim.

He arrived in Vancouver, then known as Granville, in September of 1885. He chose to remain after his ship *Robert Kerr*, having sustained damage off San Juan Island, was declared unseaworthy. Joe took to his new surroundings, as the saying goes, “like a duck to water”. He quickly found employment at Hast-



Iconic Joe Fortes, lifeguard of English Bay. PHOTO C.1920, STUART THOMSON, CVA AM1535 - CVA 99-1223

ings Sawmill, later becoming a bootblack and porter at the Sunnyside Hotel. He is credited with helping Sunnyside resident Jessie Ross and her son escape from the Great Vancouver Fire on June 13, 1886.

Joe ‘discovered’ his beloved English Bay Beach by chance one spring day, circa 1887, while conveying a rowboat-load of groceries and supplies to Jerry’s Cove. He pulled in for a closer look at the glistening quartz crystals that sparkled invitingly in the afternoon sun, and his true life’s calling was born.

The years that followed are nothing short of legend. A young black man of Caribbean origins, with little cash at hand and few possessions, defied the prejudices and mindsets of the time to endear himself to Vancouver citizens. In 1900, beachgoers successfully petitioned to have him hired as Vancouver’s first official lifeguard and Special Constable. He fulfilled both duties admirably, on call 24 hours a day year-round from his shore-side cottage, no matter how rough the weather, no matter how belligerent the rabble rouser.

Holy Rosary Cathedral was packed to the full for Joe’s civic funeral (a rare

honour in Vancouver) on February 10th. Church organist Miss Adele Heritage defied tradition by playing a familiar plantation melody, “Old Black Joe.”

Joe’s funeral cortège through downtown Vancouver streets was viewed by some ten thousand onlookers bundled against late winter sleet. The Elks Brass Band playing Chopin’s funeral march followed the hearse, which was flanked by an honour guard of uniformed Vancouver Police Constables. Joe’s flower-bedecked rowboat, bearing a set of oars with paddles pointed astern, brought tears to many in the crowd.

Joe was laid to rest in Mountain View Cemetery. For many years, his gravestone was a simple stone marker bearing the name, JOE. An additional marker of blue granite was donated in 2005 by Kearney Funeral Services.

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(February is Black History Month. Lisa Anne Smith is a VHS member and director of the Hastings Mill Museum. We are delighted that our predecessors in the Vancouver Historical Society named Joe Fortes the “Citizen of the Century” in 1986.)

