



A New History of Vancouver

By John Belshaw

There have been several histories of Vancouver but few sweeping ones that take us from the late eighteenth century to something like present day. The last such attempt was Eric Nicol's in 1970. Since then the studies of many and various aspects of the city's history have multiplied and so, too, the need for a single work to make sense of it all.

Daniel Francis is just the guy to take on the task. In a sense, he's been preparing for *Becoming Vancouver* for decades.

Francis is the author of some thirty books, most of them on aspects of British Columbia and Vancouver history. He's covered a huge spectrum of topics, enough to fill an encyclopedia ... which he also did. *The Encyclopedia of British Columbia* is monumental but so, too, is his 1992 book, *The Imaginary Indian*. From there he turned to themes like prohibition, the sex trade in Vancouver, photography and Indigenous peoples, the anti-Bolshevik campaigns of 1918-1919, and Vancouver's exceptional long-term mayor, Louis D. Taylor. In fact, if you wanted to pull together a library of Vancouver historical topics, the fastest way to do so would be to assemble a collection of Francis-abilia.

All of this sets up Francis for a voyage into the story of his hometown, a city of which he is clearly proud ... but not smug, a Vancouverite trait he doesn't like. What is refreshing about Francis' approach to Vancouver is that his pride is located in the everyday. He's not a booster, which can be a problem with civic histories.

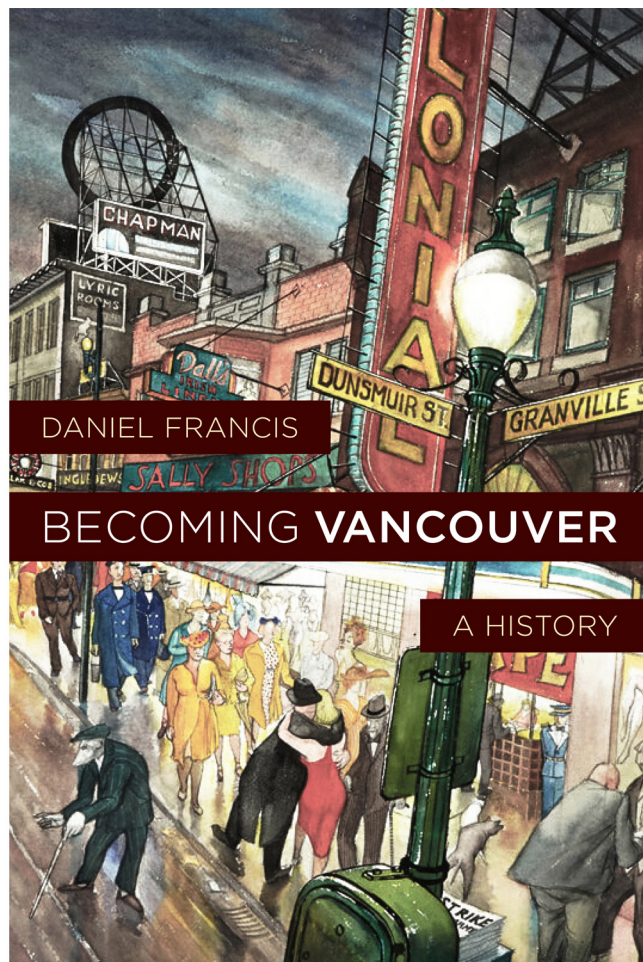
Francis made a point of not reading the older, aggressively sunny histories of Vancouver from the 1960s when he set his project in motion. "I didn't want to be influenced by them." Instead, he turned to some fifty years' worth of new research

on the city's past, much of which takes a more critical turn. Striking a balance between the unblushing celebratory style of past histories and the more recent material was a real challenge: "I was trying to walk a line between the most cynical views and remembering to highlight some of the accomplishments and why people like living here so much."

Becoming Vancouver starts well, but it's how it lands that sets it apart. Anyone could point to changes which took place over the course of a century but it takes a combination of smart history and eyewitness sensibilities to capture the ways in which the city changed from the 1950s through Y2K. Having spent most of his years in Vancouver, Francis says he "had insight into what were the major events and characters who might not be mentioned by someone who hadn't lived through it." Francis brings humility to his memories, knowing that they are not definitive, and checks the references and original sources too.

This serves us well when we look at the apparent transformation of the Downtown East Side (DTES) in the 1980s – a process that Francis is smart enough to know was underway decades earlier. How Vancouver goes into and comes out of Expo '86 is handled without cheerleading or contempt. The de-

This month's speaker:
Daniel Francis



Becoming Vancouver's dust-jacket illustration is "Granville By Night," a 1946 watercolour by Jack Shadbolt.

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UNIVERSITY GALLERIES

mographic transformation of the city in the 1990s, the campaign for the 2010 Olympics, and the ways in which 'Vancouverism' city planning fits into the story are nicely woven together.

A well-struck balance of personalities and context make *Becoming Vancouver* a book for our times. On the one hand, Francis sought out "the characters who will illuminate some of the themes I discuss." On the other hand, "some just

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President's Notes

The VHS Board met early in December to discuss upcoming programs and begin the work of lining up speakers for March and the months thereafter.

In Director John Belshaw's phrase, we're looking for a few "Goldilocks lectures" – something a little bit light and entertaining that will still contain enough historical material to meet the grade. Mike Riste's talk in November on the Jericho Golf Course was just such an engaging mix of fact and golfing tales, an antidote to some of the "heavier" subjects we've presented in the last couple of years.

It will be two years in February since our last live lecture with Valerie Jerome and I confess to having settled into the routine of the computer, the old sweater and the slippers for almost all of the talks I attend and meetings I join. This virtual world has been a live-saver for organizations such as ours, and the move back to actually *seeing* people, shaking hands with them, and watching and listening to a real person is not without anxiety. It will take some time to adjust. As I write this in mid-December, the news that isn't about rain is about Omicron, so our future is still uncertain.

Nevertheless, we would have returned to the Museum of Vancouver for January 27th, checking vax passports at the door and obeying all the health protocols, but for a renovation program on the Joyce Walley Room that may not be finished in time. Therefore it will be February, subject of course to all the public health issues, when we return to in-person events. The panel discussion we have scheduled will work much better live rather than on Zoom.

However, we're also intending to live-stream the talk to YouTube, thanks to the technical expertise of Elwin Xie and his volunteer crew. Many of you will have watched live-streamed events during the pandemic. They're a good option for people who are reluctant or unable to go out. Stay tuned to the newsletter and our emailings for further details.

And please write to us at this email or vanhistoricalsociety@gmail.com, or by post, and let us know how you would like to see the lectures as we work through what, we hope, will be the end of COVID.

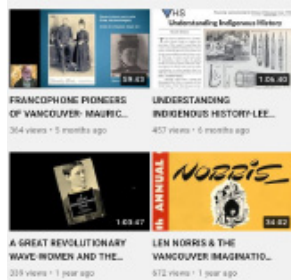
Michael Kluckner, President
presidentvhs@gmail.com

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 January 27th lecture with Daniel Francis will be a Zoom presentation. The intention is to hold subsequent lectures live at the MoV, but also to stream them live onto YouTube. More details will follow in the February newsletter.

February 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.

April 3rd or 10th (tentative), 2022

Incorporation Day Luncheon

We hope to be able to return to this delightful annual event for the first time since 2019.

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Letters home from a travelling librarian

If you remember “travel” and “hotels” you are not alone, but if you remember “hotel stationery” you’re dating yourself.

John Ridington, UBC’s first librarian, travelled extensively for his work in the 1930s and wrote to “Mrs. John Ridington,” his second wife – the former Muriel Patience Fallows – from the hotels where he stayed, using the hotels’ stationery. Typically both the stationery and the envelopes would be printed with an etched (intaglio-printed) image of the hotel.

Born in London England in 1868, Ridington was the eighth of nine children, and immigrated to Canada when he was 21. He was first employed as a schoolteacher and newspaperman in rural Manitoba, and then as a real estate salesman. Like so many others, he moved to Vancouver about 1910 and got caught up in the land-speculation boom. He lost everything in the crash of 1913 and was destitute to the point of borrowing money from neighbours. (It is interesting to compare his circumstances then with those of 20 years later, when he and his wife were able to live on a beautiful view property near Sasamat on West 1st Avenue.)

However, in August 1914 he was appointed “Acting Librarian” of the new University of British Columbia, and remained as such for eight years while presidents Wesbrook and Klinck searched for someone more qualified. The latter finally named him “Librarian” in 1922. He retired in 1940.

A later university librarian, Basil Stuart-Stubbs, had collected Ridington’s letters for an essay and gave me the envelopes, all of which have postmarks from the early 1930s. Ridington’s papers are held in UBC Rare Books & Special Collections; the biographical information above is part of the Ridington Family Fonds and was compiled by Christopher Hives.

—Michael Kluckner



Our Collaboration with the SFU History Program

By Jurian ter Horst

In September 2021, the Vancouver Historical Society engaged in a new endeavor to promote research on Vancouver history. Our organization started a collaborative research project with Dr. Nicolas Kenny's HIST 486 – History of Vancouver class at Simon Fraser University to encourage young students to learn about the city's past. What started as a trial turned out to be a great success and is now considered to be repeated in the future!

Back to in-person learning, masked and socially distanced, a small group of SFU students started their fall semester knowing that they would be encouraged by the VHS to learn about Vancouver history and to share their research findings with a larger audience. One of the main objectives of the HIST 486 course was to explore the ways in which the past is present in Vancouver today; their end product an individual research paper, as well as a digital project (video, website, social media) that could be shared with a broad audience via VHS.

Board members first met with Dr. Nicolas Kenny and his students at their September 27 seminar. Unfortunately, the weather was not in our favour, and our president Michael Kluckner had to convert his walking tour to a bird-view talk from Harbour Centre's second floor, over-



looking parts of Downtown Vancouver, Burrard Inlet and Gastown. It was the starting point of great discussions and research which continued throughout the entire course, and eventually culminated in 8 wonderful presentations.

On December 6, board members joined Dr. Kenny's students at the presentations of their final projects. The topics covered varied from histories of, and contemporary perspectives on Chinatown, Hogan's Alley, Stanley Park and Riverview Hospital, to the Japanese-Canadian internment, Vancouver's punk music scene, the Indigenous presence and representation during the 2010 Winter Olympics, and Expo 86. The students

were able to share something personal in their research topics and used their creativity to present their findings in a digital project of their choice. One student had created a Facebook page, another used Tumblr (a website for blogs). Others created a video, podcast or webpage.

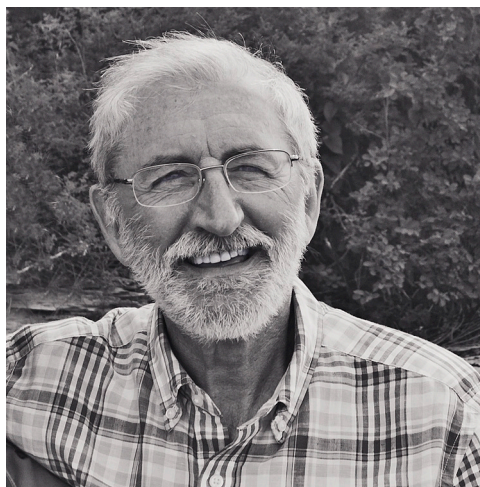
The VHS reached out to SFU to engage students with the organization, and to inspire them to learn about Vancouver's history. VHS is happy and proud to have been involved with a new generation of future professionals, and would like to express its gratitude to all the HIST 486 students, Dr. Nicolas Kenny and SFU for their collaboration on this great project!

Vancouver...

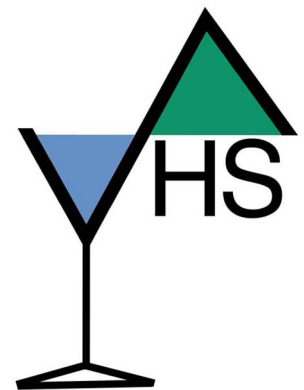
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force their way in." Whether it's mayors or trolley-train drivers, the people of Vancouver populate this book in ways that we have not seen before.

And while the shelves groan with histories of the years down to the 1970s, the last fifty years cry out for historical exploration. Join us on the 27th of January, when Daniel Francis shines a light on Vancouver in our lifetimes.



Daniel Francis, our January speaker



HAPPY NEW YEAR!