



The Francophone Pioneers of Vancouver: A Little-known History and Legacy

By Lynn Copeland

Exploring the website of the 'Société historique francophone de la Colombie-Britannique', <https://www.shfcb.ca/>, one begins to understand the quintessential role Francophones played and continue to play in the exploration, founding, and evolving cultural and historical vibrancy of British Columbia. **Maurice Guibord**, our March speaker, being Directeur général and, previously, Président, was instrumental in the creation of this wonderful resource.

The SHFCB, established in 2009, is a revitalization of the earlier organization la Société historique franco-colombienne (SHFC). Appropriately the tagline of the SHFCB website is '*Une histoire toujours vivante*', since the Société seeks to capture the history and culture of la Francophonie not only on its web site, but in its many colloquia and field trips, in its advocacy, and in its continually increasing collections, archive and library (currently housed at la Maison de la Francophonie de Vancouver [MFV]), with the intention of eventually making them available to the public at large.

I encourage a visit to the website for those interested in the history and culture of Francophones in BC. There is a rich archive of stories and oral histories, post cards, stuff for kids, and quizzes for adults.

Just one example: the story of two early Francophone aviatrixes in BC, Élianne Roberge (one of the first female commercial pilots in Canada) and Alma Gaudreau, who were members of BC's 'Flying Seven' group, the first Canadian



The original Flying Seven club, Élianne Roberge is third from right.

CREDIT: SHFCB

all-female flying club. The Club played a role in training pilots during WWII, despite limitations on female participation.

Just a glimpse of what else one learns from the site... Francophones first arrived in BC in the late 1700s as explorers and voyageurs in the fur trade, among the first newcomers to the region, and have remained an active and vibrant force in the province's development. There are currently more than 290,000 French-speaking people in BC, and more than 40 francophone associations and organizations actively representing the French language and culture in the province.

A further example of the effect of Société's (and Guibord's) work is its advocacy, for example having ensured the inclusion of the Guichon family story at the BC Museum in an exhibit of fami-

**March Speaker:
Maurice Guibord**

lies that helped build BC. As Guibord indicated in a *Times-Colonist* interview, the Guichon brothers were early immigrants to the West Coast who established themselves in many key industries in the province, including agriculture, ranching and tourism. Their descendants have maintained their ties to the family ranching business and the Nicola Valley for generations. "This is one of the oldest French-speaking families in the province, that maintained its use of that language for several generations," noted Guibord.

Guibord has been honoured for his contributions to the Province of British Columbia; for example during celebrations for BC's 15th annual Journée de la

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President's Notes

Every month in COVID Land brings us new experiences and challenges. A year ago when the restrictions were just beginning, we wondered how we would survive without our familiar venue at the MoV. Instead, our membership has increased by about 15 percent and our audience has also grown to about 100 sign-ins, which probably amounts to 125 people, for each lecture. At the Museum, we regularly saw 60 to 80 attendees and only occasionally, with a speaker such as Carleen Thomas from the Tsleil-Waututh Nation or Aaron Chapman with "The Last Gang in Town," would we fill all the seats and every spot along the wall.



Our Zoom account limited us to 100 sign-ins, which we felt would be adequate but turned out not to be for Anne Wyness's talk on the James Inglis Reid butcher shop in January. If you were one of the people who couldn't get in, we sincerely apologize. Another glitch in our system was the electronic mailing list we use for the Zoom invitation, which is updated at the beginning of the month and then used three weeks later for invitation mailouts. Until now, if you joined VHS during those three weeks, chances are you didn't get an invitation. Again, apologies, and we've upgraded our Zoom account to the next level.

Regardless, if you haven't received the Zoom invitation within a few days of the event, please write to the email below and we'll send it to you.

* * *

Thoughts of Spring always include our Incorporation Day luncheon, traditionally held on the Sunday closest to April 6th at the University Golf Club. Not surprisingly, we have had to cancel for a second year, and I thank the members who have optimistically said "we'll see you in 2022" when I contacted them about refunds from their 2020 tickets. We were so looking forward, last year as this one, to giving the Award of Merit to Susan Point, and briefly considered doing it as a virtual celebration, but will be patient until we can gather again next year.

And, thanks to all of you who filled out the online survey last month (see the story on the next page). We're going to do it every month for a while to try to gauge how our audience shifts as our programs change.

Please stay well. See you online soon.

Michael Kluckner
presidentvhs@gmail.com

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.

April 22, 2021

At The Bridge: James Teit and an Anthropology of Belonging

Speaker: Wendy Wickwire

Wendy Wickwire, Emerita Professor in the Department of History at the University of Victoria, will present the fascinating story of Shetland Islander James Teit, himself a victim of displacement, who spent four decades as an amateur ethnographer and Indigenous rights activist in BC; following his death, his research was incorporated into the work of academic anthropologists including the famed Franz Boas, and Teit was largely forgotten.

May 27, 2021

Deinstitutionalization and the MAD Movement in Canada

Speaker: Megan Davis (University of Toronto)

September 20, 2021

Landscapes of Injustice (the Nikkei Experience in Canada)

Speaker: Dr. Jordan Stanger-Ross (University of Victoria)

New VHS Members

Helen Aqua	Alex Jameson
Caelen Campbell	Michael Levy
Ian Harvey	Josephine Pleshakov

Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2020 - 2021

(ELECTED MAY 28, 2020)

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The Grouse Mountain Chalet, designed in 1925–6 by architects Townley & Matheson (who designed Vancouver City Hall a decade later) and built of yellow cedar logs by Finnish and Swedish craftsmen. It was the most dramatic investment of William Curtis Shelly, the baker-turned-businessman, alderman, Park Board member and minister of finance in the Tolmie government that foundered on the shoals of the Depression in 1933. The chalet passed into the hands of the *Sun*'s Cromie family and burned down in 1962. A 2016 talk on Shelly entitled "Selling Bread to Housewives" is on the VHS's YouTube channel.

PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, MICHAEL KLUCKNER COLLECTION

BC's Francophone legacy

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Francophonie, March 14, 2017, his 'invaluable contribution to the research and dissemination of BC's francophone history and heritage' was recognized.

Guibord will talk about the presence of Francophones in every facet of life in early Vancouver, sometimes in surprising quarters. "From an architect nun and a man who walked across Canada

to an opera singer and the ubiquitous French *restaurateur*, most followed the same lure to the West Coast as most of the other early European settlers. Some created their own villages, while others melted into the crowd. Some erected their own buildings, while others saw theirs burn down. A teacher, a priest, a doctor, a photographer and a drunk, sell-

ers of shoes, clothes, jewels and tobacco, all came to the new city, while at least one came, had enough and left. These are human stories, stories of settlement, of families staying together, of families moving up in the world on the West Coast. And while learning a new language, their mother tongue, French, bound them all together."

Survey Results

In the notification before the January meeting, we included a survey form that 57 participants filled out. Nearly 80% felt the lecture was excellent and almost the entire balance had it as 'good.' And the vast majority – 96.5% – thought it was about the right length. More than half of the respondents heard about the

event through our email blast that comes out before the paper newsletter, and nearly one-fifth heard of it through family and friends – we had a large number of non-member viewers.

Who were we? 77% were members and just over 80% are seniors – perhaps related to the topic of a store that closed its doors almost 35 years ago.

The survey following the February

lecture yielded similar results. Comments included "Loved that it felt like a conversation and not a prepared lecture. Very powerful and personal presentation," and "very engaging presentation, probably a combination of topic and speaker."

More than 100 sign-ins attended the January lecture, about 75 last month. There will be another survey in the email inviting you to the March lecture.

50+ Years of French Immersion in Vancouver

By Jessica Quan

In 1969, the Official Languages Act solidified the federal bilingualism of the country. English and French, and the cultural and linguistic values that accompany them, were officially recognized as part of the quintessential “Canadian” identity. From the era of the “Quiet Revolution” and FLQ terrorism, to the second Quebec Referendum of ‘95, the battle between Canada’s two official languages still simmers from afar. Its historical legacies in British Columbia can be marked in public education in 1977 with the establishment of the *Programme cadre de français* (French public schooling) by the Government of BC and in 1995 with the *Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique* (Francophone Education Authority or School District No 93) created to ensure the constitutional rights to minority language education (section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms).

I’m a K-12 graduate of the VSB French Immersion program. As an Anglophone or English-speaker and third-generation Japanese-Chinese Canadian, what was the goal of my experience in the quest for a unified bilingual nation? I asked my parents why they chose to enroll me in the program, and like most, the interest was around the opportunity to learn a second language. I questioned it then and I still question it today: why didn’t they enroll me in weekend Japanese or Chinese classes, languages we didn’t speak at home, but were familiar to me from inter-generational and cultural osmosis?

I’ve been recently reflecting on my own experiences in French Immersion and the lack of *la langue française* in my life today. To be honest French was a drag (sometimes literally) with lots of focus on grammar and dictation, and less on the spoken word. It’s hard to create an immersive atmosphere when most kids don’t want to speak French – it’s school after all. The best bits were the cultural connections like festivals (*festival du bois*, *bonhomme d’hiver*, assemblies and school musicals, and the annual field trip to watch a French film at The Ridge Theatre. Imagine one large theatre full of loud, unruly elementary students watching very French films (ie nudity). Our French teachers were diverse: from traditionalists from France to my favourite, a real *Québécoise* – a breath of fresh air and authentically patois.

When I did finally go to Quebec, post-secondary, I certainly didn’t use much French. Besides occasionally ask-



Quilchena Elementary School Class Photo 1989-90.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SIMONE LEUNG.

ing for directions, I’ve not used my French in France either, and quite frankly none of us FI grads do. We learned a language but can’t speak it. Our French immersion went from full-time in K-3, and then by Grade 4-7 it was maybe 50% and then by highschool, only a handful of classes were in French, an exercise in academics and translation, rather than a purposeful retention and improvement in speech or skills.

An unfortunate legacy of French Immersion to the local school system has been the perceived benefits of a “choice program” where the demand exceeds the opportunities and creates inequities among the English-only catchment schools. Yes, my best friends are those I made in French Immersion, but we bond now on the typical school memories and our poor retention of the French language.

Since it’s universally understood that learning a second language is good for the brain, how do we take into account that over 50% of Vancouverites already speak a second-language, English! With all this clamouring for another language seen as an advantage, we should be embracing our multilingual society.

I registered my own son at one French Immersion school and was #90 on the waitlist. Ultimately, it’s not the end of the road. Cantonese lessons are offered around the city, by younger teachers interested in passing on conversational usage in a non-traditional way. Or, I could pursue a language I have felt most akin to, from my hobbies and general interest: Spanish. Neither my children nor I may ever be truly bilingual (unlike many others who live here), but if we can all continue to learn basic greetings in languages besides French and English, we can all learn to speak the historic as well as original languages and tongues of this shared place we call home.